English Readings

MACAULAY'S LIFE OF JOHNSON

GREENOUGH

"The virtue of books is the perfecting of reason, which is indeed the happiness of man."

Richard De Bury.

ENGLISH READINGS FOR SCHOOLS

"On bokès for to rede I me delyte."

Chaucer.

English Readings

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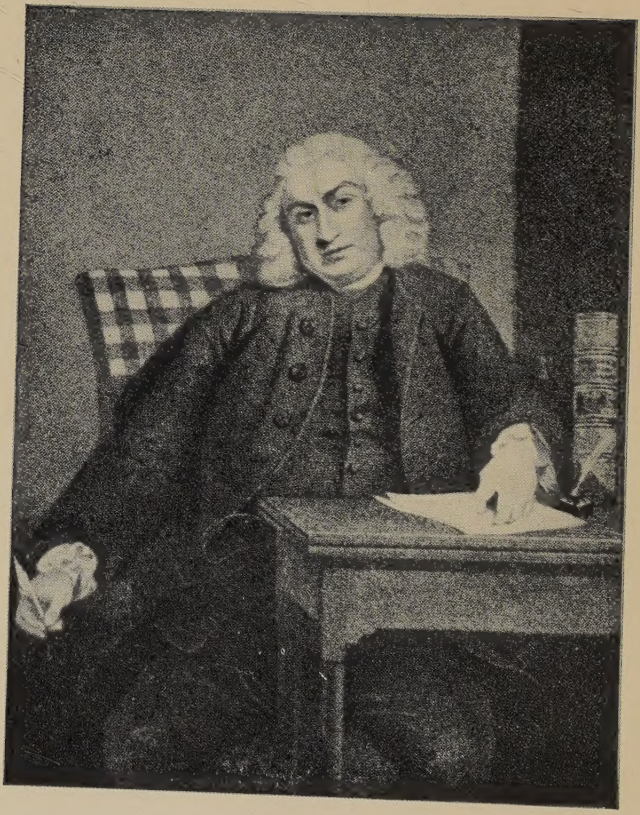

Samuel Johnson
From a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds

MACAULAY'S LIFE OF JOHNSON

AND SELECTIONS FROM JOHNSON'S WRITINGS

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INTRODUCTION

I

MACAULAY'S LIFE

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, born October 25, 1800, was of good stock,—Scotch Presbyterian and Quaker blood united. By his excellent mother he was wisely brought through a precocious but happy childhood, during which, though he did not altogether neglect play, he loved best to read incessantly and to talk about what he had read. This manner of life he continued at a private school near Cambridge, where his studies, though limited in number, were of a sort to give him a genuine love for sound literature. He wrote to his mother: "We do Latin verses twice a week . . .. We are exercised also once a week in English composition, and once in Latin composition, and letters of persons renowned in history . . .. We get by heart Greek grammar or Virgil every evening." English literature, meanwhile, seems to have delighted Macaulay not as one of his tasks, but as a recreation. At fifteen he prefers Boccaccio to Chaucer, and recommends his mother to look up Dryden's *Fables*. For *Gil Blas* he has "unbounded admiration," and he has read a good deal of Gibbon. Yet he was a natural boy, too, and in one of his delightful letters from school promised to bring home a pair of rabbits for his sisters if his "purse is sufficient."

At eighteen he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, for which he always retained the most affectionate regard. At Trinity his friends, an eager, able, generous-minded group, were men to challenge his best abilities in conversation and debate. For a very high place in scholarship Macaulay was disqualified by his lack of inclination for the physical and mathematical studies that have long been honored at Cambridge. It is characteristic of him that he followed his own bent, neglected science and methodical studies generally, and read largely in the direction of least resistance. In later years he expressed regret that he had not disciplined his mind by severe application to the despised subjects. "I often regret, and even acutely," he wrote, "my want of a senior wrangler's knowledge[1] of physics and mathematics; and I regret still more some habits of mind which a senior wrangler is pretty certain to possess." Nor was Macaulay a friend to the time-honored practice of perfecting himself in Greek and Latin composition, skill at which was necessary to the candidate for honors. His Latin declamation, however, was good enough to win him a prize, and in 1821 he received a Craven scholarship, as well as prizes for essays and poems. In 1824 he became a Fellow of Trinity, a high honor which gave him, then and always, the greatest satisfaction. His residence at Trinity was a happy and influential period in his life. Though to a certain degree neglecting some of the specially prescribed studies of the place, he was there, as everywhere, a vigorous reader and a great talker and debater. Much of the peculiar excellence of his later work, as well as many of its faults, may doubtless be traced in part to the fact that he

[1] The senior wrangler at Cambridge is the winner of highest honors in mathematics.

could not satisfy himself with the routine prescribed by the schools.[1]

Meanwhile Macaulay's father had undergone financial losses which now made it necessary that his son should choose a profession, and accordingly he turned to the law, though not with his whole heart. His legal studies did not prevent him from sending contributions to various magazines, one of which,—the well-known essay on Milton,—appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1825. This was an event of great importance in Macaulay's career. The *Edinburgh Review,* founded in 1802, was a quarterly periodical of the greatest prestige. Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, Horner, and others, had given it a position in both politics and literature which made it in every way the best place in which the essays of a young man with interests and views like Macaulay's could possibly appear. But the older generation of *Edinburgh* reviewers were just then beginning to need the reinforcement of younger and more vigorous pens. Indeed, the editor, Francis Jeffrey, had recently written down from Edinburgh to a correspondent in London: "Can you not lay your hands on some clever young man who would write for us? The original supporters of the work are getting old, and either too busy or too stupid, and here the young men are mostly Tories."

Immediate success followed the publication of the article on Milton. "The more I think," wrote Jeffrey, "the less I can conceive where you picked up that style." Other articles followed—on Machiavelli, Hallam, Southey, Byron, Bunyan, Hampden, and a wealth of other subjects—to such effect that it became a saying among the booksellers that the *Edinburgh* sold or did not sell ac-

[1] Trevelyan's biography, particularly the letters, will be found unusually interesting for this part of Macaulay's life.

cording as it contained or did not contain an article by Macaulay. The young reviewer was even offered the editorship upon the retirement of Jeffrey in 1829, but he wisely declined. Almost every number of the *Review* between 1830 and 1834 had a long contribution from him, however, written rapidly in the midst of many other concerns.

For upon the appearance of the Milton article in 1825, Macaulay had become something of a literary lion. His letters make frequent mention of the people he met,—and very fine people they were,—of the talk on literature and politics, and of his hearty and simple enjoyment of it all. "I dined yesterday at Holland House; all lords except myself," he writes[1] on July 2, 1832; and this means that Macaulay was extraordinarily sought after. The opinion voiced by Crabb Robinson in 1826 seems to have been general: "I had a most interesting companion in young Macaulay, one of the most promising of the rising generation I have seen for a long time. He has a good face, not the delicate features of a man of genius and sensibility, but the strong lines and well-knit limbs of a man sturdy in body and mind. Very eloquent and cheerful. Overflowing with words, and not poor in thought. Liberal in opinion, but no radical. He seems a correct as well as a full man. He showed a minute knowledge of subjects not introduced by himself."[2] No wonder that "for the space of three seasons he dined out almost nightly."[3]

Yet these dinners and parties were only an incident in a busy life of affairs. For Macaulay was sitting in Parliament, where, in 1831, he had made a first speech (upon the Reform Bill) which caused the Speaker to send for

[1] Trevelyan, I, 233. [2] Trevelyan, I, 120.
[3] Trevelyan, I, 166.

him to say that he had never seen the House more stirred. Sir Robert Peel and others of great authority regarded Macaulay, almost from this first effort, as one of the leading speakers of the House. Nor was his usefulness limited to his admirable oratory. As a commissioner of the Board of Control he made himself an authority upon Indian affairs, and in 1833 was made a member of the Supreme Council of India. This office took him to Calcutta for nearly four years, to his great regret; but it enabled him, while living as befitted his official position, to save from his annual salary of £10,000 an amount sufficient to place the finances of the family upon a fairly comfortable basis. In India Macaulay, besides reading prodigiously and writing for the *Edinburgh Review,* did really important work in constructing the Indian educational system and the criminal code. His efforts in regard to the latter commanded the admiration of trained lawyers, and are said to be bearing good fruit to this day.

Returning to England in 1838, Macaulay took up all his previous activities, and in addition began his *History,* became between 1839 and 1841 a cabinet minister, published his *Lays of Ancient Rome* in 1842, and his collected *Essays* in 1843, and made some telling speeches in Parliament.[1] With power and influence still unimpaired he began, in 1844, to allow himself more time for his *History*. There can be no doubt that he would have done well to give up writing for the *Edinburgh Review* earlier in order to concentrate his efforts. His contributions to the *Edinburgh* during these years are not usually equal to his very best, and we know from his letters to Napier, the

[1] The speech (1842) on Literary Copyright should, if possible, be read. It is a fine combination of ready scholarship and fluent oratory.

editor, that reviewing seriously interfered with the progress of the *History*. "I ought to give my whole leisure to my *History*," he wrote in 1843; "and I fear that if I suffer myself to be diverted from that design as I have done, I shall . . . leave behind me the character of a man who would have done something if he had concentrated his powers instead of frittering them away. I do assure you that, if it were not on your account, I should have already given up writing for the *Review* at all. There are people who can carry on twenty works at a time. . . . But I am of a different temper. I never write to please myself until my subject has for the time driven away every other out of my head. When I turn from one work to another, a great deal of time is lost in the mere transition." [1]

In 1847, after an exciting election in which he was badly treated, Macaulay lost his seat as Member of Parliament for Edinburgh, and so was still further enabled to give himself quietly and steadily to the composition of the *History*. Though doubtless smarting at his defeat, Macaulay perhaps never wrote anything more genuine than the fine verses composed on the very night of the election, in which he

> . . . slumbered, and in slumber saw once more
> A room in an old mansion, long unseen.
>
> That room, methought, was curtained from the light,
> Yet through the curtains shone the moon's cold ray
> Full on a cradle, where, in linen white,
> Sleeping life's first soft sleep, an infant lay.

Past the sleeping boy there sweep disdainfully the queens of Gain, of Fashion, of Power, and of Pleasure, until

[1] Napier's *Correspondence*, p. 425.

Came one, the last, the mightiest, and the best.

Oh! glorious lady, with the eyes of light,
And laurels clustering round thy lofty brow,
Who by the cradle's side didst watch the night,
Warbling a sweet strange music, who wast thou?

"Yes, darling; let them go," so ran the strain:
"Yes; let them go—gain, fashion, pleasure, power,
And all the busy elves to whose domain
Belongs the nether sphere, the fleeting hour.

. . . . . .

"Of the fair brotherhood who share my grace,
I, from thy natal day, pronounce thee free;
And, if for some I keep a nobler place,
I keep for none a happier than for thee.

. . . . . .

"I brought the wise and brave of ancient days
To cheer the cell where Raleigh pined alone.
I lighted Milton's darkness with the blaze
Of the bright ranks that guard the eternal throne."

Having seen this vision, and having felt that he could never "leave public life with more dignity and grace than at present," Macaulay really set himself at work. He wrote in 1849, after the first two volumes of the *History* had appeared: "I have now made up my mind to change my plan about my *History*. I will first set myself to know the whole subject; to get, by reading and traveling, a full acquaintance with William's reign. . . . I must visit Holland, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, France. The Dutch archives and French archives must be ransacked. . . . I must turn over hundreds, thousands, of pamphlets. Lambeth, the Bodleian, and the other Oxford libraries, the Devonshire Papers, the British Museum,

must be explored, and notes made: and then I shall go to work. When the materials are ready, and the *History* mapped out in my mind, I ought easily to write, on an average, two of my pages daily. In two years from the time I begin writing I shall have more than finished my second part. Then I reckon a year for polishing, retouching, and printing. This brings me to the autumn of 1853. I like this scheme much."

The first two volumes of the *History* appeared in 1848; the third and fourth in 1855; the fifth, constructed by his sister, Lady Trevelyan, from her brother's unfinished notes, in 1861. Few works in all English literature have met with such prompt and striking success. Lord Jeffrey wrote that he was as proud of Macaulay as his own mother could possibly have been; and a group of humble artisans near Manchester, who had the *History* read aloud to them, moved a vote of thanks "to Mr. Macaulay for having written a history which workingmen can understand." Thirteen thousand copies were sold in four months. From the United States came news that hardly ever had any book there had such a sale. On the Continent four different translators were vying with each other to produce the first version in German, and ultimately the book was turned into at least ten different European languages. In 1856 his publishers paid him £20,000 in royalties. When joked and congratulated upon his fortunes, Macaulay, who kept his head finely through it all, said that he "had some thoughts of going to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as a bidder for the next loan."

All this, of course, meant comfort for the remainder of Macaulay's life. He bought a pleasant villa at Kensington, enjoyed his garden, gave quiet dinners, worked at the last part of his *History,* and finished the few brief

but excellent biographies, of which the text of this volume is one, which appeared in the *Encyclopædia Britannica.* In 1857, to the satisfaction of every one, he became Baron Macaulay of Rothley (his birthplace). On the 28th of December, 1859, he died quietly in his library, with an open book upon his knees. He was buried, near Addison, in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

II

MACAULAY'S WRITINGS

SPEECHES.—Macaulay's speeches, nearly all on political subjects and nearly all made in Parliament, were collected and authoritatively published in 1854. Although little read nowadays, they belong with Macaulay's very best work on account of their extraordinary vigor and clearness of style, their steady warmth of tone, and the vast stores of illustrative information so rapidly and easily directed to the point under discussion.

With regard to Macaulay's manner of speaking, a reporter who must have heard him frequently tells us that "his voice was full and loud; but it had not the light and shade, or the modulation, found in practised speakers. His speeches were most carefully prepared, and were repeated without the loss or omission of a single word."[1]

Concerning the influence of Macaulay's speeches we have the important testimony of Gladstone[2] that "twice at least in the House of Commons he arrested the successful progress of legislative measures, and slew them at a

[1] Quoted in Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay,* II, 126.
[2] *Gleanings of Past Years,* II, 270.

moment's notice and by his single arm. The first of these occasions was the Copyright Bill of Serjeant Talfourd in 1841; the second, the Bill of 1853 for excluding the Master of the Rolls from the House of Commons. But, whenever he rose to speak, it was a summons like a trumpet-call to fill the benches."

LAYS OF ANCIENT ROME.—"What! poetry from Macaulay? Ay, and why not? . . . If he be not the first of critics, . . . who is? . . . The Young Poets all want fire; Macaulay is full of fire. The Young Poets are somewhat weakly; he is strong. The Young Poets are rather ignorant; his knowledge is great. The Young Poets mumble books; he devours them. The Young Poets dally with their subject; he strikes its heart. The Young Poets are still their own heroes; he sees but the chiefs he celebrates. . . . Sir Walter [Scott] would have rejoiced in Horatius as if he had been a doughty Douglas.

> Now by our sire Quirinus
> It was a goodly sight
> To see the thirty standards
> Swept down the tide of flight.

That is the way of doing business! A cut-and-thrust style, without any flourish. Scott's style when his blood was up, and the first words came like a vanguard impatient for battle."[1]

With this hearty slap on the back, "Christopher North,"[2] a rival critic writing for an unfriendly review,

[1] *Blackwood's Magazine,* quoted by Trevelyan, II, 110.

[2] John Wilson ("Christopher North"), 1785-1854, essayist and professor of moral philosophy, was one of the most genuine persons of his time. Look into his *Noctes Ambrosianæ,* and the *Memoir* of him by his daughter, Mrs. Gordon.

welcomed Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842). Although these *Lays* are in form entirely different from Macaulay's other works, they deserve a word here, not only for their own sake, but because in their manner of bodying forth past events they are not unlike Macaulay's essays and his *History*. For in the *Lays,* as in the essays and the *History,* Macaulay's chief aim is copiousness and vividness of detail, his most conspicuous merits of style are clearness and vigor, and his worst defects are his partiality and his tendency to harangue. "Horatius," the first of the *Lays,* is a good example of the merits of Macaulay's verse,—spirited, compact, eloquent in its praise of soldierly and civic excellence. The suspense just before the crisis, the crash of the falling bridge (stanza 55), the struggle in the water (stanzas 61 and 62), and the triumphant conclusion,—all are related in Macaulay's best manner. Many passages are defective in one way or another: Macaulay never could portray the pathetic quite successfully, and occasionally he is not at all Roman either in detail or in general tone. But on the whole it may be said that, although laboring against the disadvantage that poetry was not for him a natural means of expression, Macaulay nevertheless managed by means of his great stores of information and by unusually slow and careful composition, to achieve some exceedingly effective reproductions of the past.

History of England.—Twenty years before the appearance of the first volume of his *History of England,* Macaulay wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* an essay on history in which he sketched his idea of a perfect historian. "A perfect historian," he wrote, "must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque. Yet he must control it so absolutely as to content himself with the materials which he finds, and

ideal a historian must unite qualities which are almost never found together,—the talents of a philosopher and the talents of a painter. And Macaulay, as his essay on Bacon shows, was not even a respectful pupil of philosophy. Furthermore, Macaulay's ideal implies a treatment so detailed that its application to any very long period requires a lifetime, or even more. For example, to write a history of the entire seventeenth century on Macaulay's scale might be roughly supposed to require a lifetime of about a hundred years, and the space of more than thirty volumes. So anything like a close approach to Macaulay's ideal is impossible, because it requires too long a time and too exceptional a temperament.

Let us, therefore, confine ourselves for the moment to the question of Macaulay's ability to reproduce vividly and minutely the persons and events of a comparatively brief period. Here he has certainly surpassed all other English historians. This achievement, however, was the result of unusual pains spent upon research and upon composition. We have already seen[1] how thoroughly Macaulay planned to examine all available materials. Frequent entries in his diary show that he was as good as his word. This is the way he spent a day at Oxford: "*October 2d, 1854.*—I called on the Warden of All Souls', who was the only soul in residence. He was most kind; got me the manuscript of Narcissus Luttrell's *Diary*

rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture." Macaulay expressly terms these but *parts* of the duty of the historian, who should also endeavor "to extract the philosophy of history—to direct our judgment of events and men—to trace the connection of causes and effects, and to draw from the occurrences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom."

[1] Pages xiii-xiv.

—seven thick volumes in cramped handwriting—put me into a comfortable room; and then left me to myself. I worked till past five; then walked for an hour or so, and dined at my inn, reading Cooper's *Pathfinder*."[1] And Macaulay was equally careful to visit, when he could, the scenes of historical events in order to study the "lay of the land."[2] Next came the difficult process of composition,—a first draft written so rapidly as to be almost illegible, and then continually polished and repolished until it seemed "to flow as easily as table-talk." He writes in his diary: "To make the narrative flow along as it ought, every part naturally springing from that which precedes . . . is not easy. Yet it may be done." And again: "To-morrow I shall begin to transcribe again, and to polish. What trouble these few pages will have cost me! The great object is that after all this trouble they may read as if they had been spoken off, and may seem to flow as easily as table-talk."[3]

The chief fault that can be found with the *History* is that Macaulay is prejudiced. He reverses Johnson's practice, his critics say, and takes care that the Whig dogs shall have the better of it. Undoubtedly cases can be shown where, as in his treatment of Penn, or of Marlborough, or of the country chaplain, Macaulay's accounts cannot possibly be called fair and complete. This seems an almost inevitable result of one of Macaulay's deepest

[1] Trevelyan, II, 193. For similar entries, see Trevelyan, II, 193-194.

[2] Trevelyan, II, 195-196.

[3] Trevelyan, II, 237, 238. The extracts from the diary which Trevelyan prints on pages 201 and 202 show that Macaulay spent almost three weeks upon the thirty pages in which he narrates the massacre of Glencoe. The passage occurs in the eighteenth chapter.

traits,—a trait to which are owing some of the chief excellences of his work. For Macaulay's devotion to certain beliefs was so whole-hearted, and his feelings about the past were so thoroughly a part of him, that he was absolutely incapable of moving about among the Whigs and Tories of the Stuart days without carrying back, into a period which few of us see clearly enough to feel violently about, all of the enthusiastic faith in his own side which made him so much better suited to be an advocate than a judge.

So, instead of expecting an absolutely just balance in the *History,* instead of censuring a vivid, minute, fervent book for lacking qualities which can exist only where the outlook is dispassionate and the treatment not too detailed to exhibit the growth and relation of the parts,—in short, instead of censuring the *History* for failing to be what such a book could not possibly be, we should be grateful for the character portraits in the twentieth chapter and elsewhere, for the third chapter, for the masterly accounts of the death and funeral of Queen Mary, of the flight of the Princess Anne, of the siege and relief of Londonderry, and of the massacre of Glencoe. The excellence of these parts of the *History* we can hardly find in Ranke, or Gardiner, or Stanhope, or anywhere, indeed, save in the brilliant pages of Macaulay himself.

Essays.—The extraordinary merits of Macaulay's essays[1] have raised them into a class where they are likely

[1] The titles and dates of Macaulay's principal essays are as follows: "Milton," 1825; "Machiavelli," 1827; "History," "Hallam's *Constitutional History,*" 1828; "Dryden," "Mill on Government," "Westminster Reviewer's Defence of Mill," "Utilitarian Theory of Government," 1829; "Southey's *Colloquies,*" "Robert Montgomery's Poems," "Sadler's *Law of Population,*" 1830; "Civil Disabilities of the Jews," "Byron," "Croker's Edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson,*" "Bunyan's

to suffer by comparison with work done under more favorable conditions and with more ambitious aims. Originally they were by no means intended for a permanent place in literature. Upon this point it will be best to let Macaulay speak for himself in words addressed, on June 24, 1842, to the editor of the *Edinburgh Review:*

"I have thought a good deal about republishing my articles, and have made up my mind not to do so. . . . On the whole, I think it best that things should remain as they are. The public judges, and ought to judge, indulgently of periodical works. They are not expected to be highly finished. Their natural life is only six weeks. Sometimes their writer is at a distance from the books to which he wants to refer. Sometimes he is forced to hurry through his task in order to catch the post. He may blunder; he may contradict himself; he may break off in the middle of a story; he may give an immoderate extension to one part of his subject and dismiss an equally important part in a few words. All this is readily forgiven if there be a certain spirit and vivacity in his style. But, as soon as he republishes, he challenges a comparison with all the most symmetrical and polished of human compositions. . . . I will not found my pretensions to the rank of a classic on my reviews."[1]

But the enterprise of piratical American publishers

Pilgrim's Progress," "Hampden," "Sadler's Refutation Refuted," 1831; "Mirabeau," "Burleigh," 1832; "War of the Succession in Spain," "Horace Walpole," 1833; "Lord Chatham," 1834; "Mackintosh's *History of the Revolution,*" 1835; "Bacon," 1837; "Sir William Temple," 1838; "Gladstone on Church and State," 1839; "Clive," "Ranke's *History of the Popes,*" 1840; "Comic Dramatists," "Lord Holland," "Warren Hastings," 1841; "Frederick the Great," 1842; "Madame d'Arblay," "Addison," "Lord Chatham," "Barère," 1844.

[1] Trevelyan, II, 101-102.

made it seem best to issue, in 1843, an authoritative collection of *Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review,* which contained twenty-seven essays; nine more were added in the *Miscellaneous Writings,* published in 1860. In a brief, straightforward preface Macaulay, after explaining that the publication was rendered necessary by unauthorized and inaccurate American editions, gave notice that no attempt had "been made to remodel any of the pieces which are contained in these volumes. Even the criticism on Milton, which was written when the author was fresh from college, and which contains scarcely a paragraph such as his matured judgment approves, still remains overloaded with gaudy and ungraceful ornament. The blemishes which have been removed were, for the most part, blemishes caused by unavoidable haste. The author has sometimes, like other contributors to periodical works, been under the necessity of writing at a distance from all books and from all advisers; of trusting to his memory for facts, dates, and quotations; and of sending manuscripts to the post without reading them over."

The effect of the volumes thus diffidently put forth has been tremendous. Few people who read at all have failed to read several of Macaulay's essays. To the ordinary reader, indeed, they are not only familiar, but they are so influential as to have overpowered every other treatment of their subjects. The popular idea of Chatham, of Hastings, and of Temple is, in consequence, almost completely founded upon Macaulay. Yet very few except students can recall the contents of a single essay by Southey, or Jeffrey, or Brougham, or Horner, or Sydney Smith, or any of the eighteenth-century reviewers. They probably remember, if they remember anything from these men, merely that Jeffrey said of some poem by Words-

worth, "This will never do." Why is it that Macaulay's essays show such vitality when compared with other works in their own class?

When Jeffrey and his associates founded the *Edinburgh Review* at the opening of the nineteenth century, they at once displaced a kind of periodical in which such essays as Macaulay's, even if there had been any one to write them, could scarcely have found a place. The eighteenth century reviews, at the head of which stood the *Monthly* (begun in 1749) and the *Critical* (1756), were managed by publishers, who virtually dictated the degree of favor or disfavor with which any given book was to be received. In consequence these reviews were served by hack-writers whose pay was miserably small and whose life in general was the wretched life of Grub Street. The reviews in the *Monthly* and the *Critical* kept closely to the book in hand; often they did little more than give an abstract of it. In the *Edinburgh Review* all this was different. The *Edinburgh,* to be sure, had its own politics; but it did not ordinarily aim to annihilate good literature merely because it was written by the wrong man. Not only were contributors free to say pretty much what they liked, but they were paid at rates that would have seemed princely to the hacks of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, no reader of the *Edinburgh Review* can fail to notice that the best articles are not merely reviews of certain books, but rather essays upon subjects rendered timely by those books. Few readers of Macaulay, for example, remember what book he was supposed to be reviewing when he wrote his "Milton," his "Addison," his "History," or his "Temple." And no wonder. For in the "Milton," Macaulay gives only two pages to the book under review, although his entire essay fills forty-nine pages. The proportion is even smaller in the "Addison," where only two pages out of

June 26, 1838, he told Napier: "I have written several things on historical, political, and moral questions, of which, on the fullest reconsideration, I am not ashamed, and by which I should be willing to be estimated; but I have never written a page of criticism on poetry or the fine arts, which I would not burn if I had the power."[1] It seems ungracious to agree with this disarming bit of self-criticism. Yet one must not only agree that most of Macaulay's literary criticism is either self-evident or valueless, but that a considerable portion of his other criticism is either wrong or ill-advised. What he says about Bacon's philosophy, about Mill, and about Boswell, for example, is deplorably bad; what he says about Montgomery and about Barère is not very well worth while. But on Hampden, on Temple, on Clive, and on the younger Pitt we read Macaulay not only with delight at the brilliancy of particular passages, but with a feeling of critical satisfaction at the tone of the whole. Here, if not elsewhere, Macaulay's essays need no allowance for the circumstances under which they were written. Taken as a whole, they stand in the very front rank of their class. And a few of them are so much superior to their class as to have lifted the entire collection, despite the unworthiness of many passages and a few entire essays, into a not wholly unsuccessful comparison with "all the most symmetrical and polished of human compositions."

[1] Trevelyan, II, 15.

III

MACAULAY ON JOHNSON

Review of Croker's Edition of Boswell.—Twenty-five years before the appearance of the essay which forms the text of this book, Macaulay had written at length upon Samuel Johnson in his well-known review of an edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* prepared by his political antagonist John Wilson Croker (1780-1857). It is instructive to compare the two pieces.

The review of Croker's edition of Boswell appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for September, 1831. It consists of three parts: the first, a severe arraignment (in fifteen pages) of the inaccuracy and stupidity of Croker; the second, a discussion of the character of Boswell, which occupies four pages; the third (eighteen pages and a half), an estimate of Johnson.

In what he had to say about Croker, Macaulay, though he did not wholly lack justification, was unquestionably too severe. The two men were antagonized by their politics, for Croker was as ardent and active on the Tory side as Macaulay was among the Whigs. On more than one occasion they had encountered each other in Parliament, with the result that Croker had referred to Macaulay's "vague generalities handled with that brilliant imagination which tickles the ear and amuses the fancy without satisfying the reason,"[1] and Macaulay's letters, particularly during 1831, contain many expressions of dis-

[1] Sir Theodore Martin's article on Croker in the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

like for "that impudent leering Croker," whom he detests "more than cold boiled veal."[1] Such expressions, though doubtless not wholly serious, give little promise of an impartial review. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that the article was written during a period of great political excitement, when the natural opposition of parties had become intensified to acute hostility. In a letter written while he was reviewing Croker's book, Macaulay admits to his sister that "the rage of faction at the present moment exceeds anything that has been known in our day. Indeed I doubt whether . . . even during the desperate struggles between the Whigs and Tories at the close of Anne's reign, the fury of party was so fearfully violent."[2] Even had these disturbing circumstances been absent, however, it may be doubted whether Macaulay and Croker could ever have appreciated each other's virtues. As it was, Macaulay, having completed his review, remarked with satisfaction that he had "beaten Croker black and blue."[3]

In violence of language, as we should expect from these extracts, Macaulay's attack is certainly not lacking. Croker's work is said to be "ill-compiled, ill-arranged, ill-expressed, and ill-printed," his notes "absolutely swarm with misstatements," he is even accused of not having "taken the slightest pains to investigate the truth of his assertions." "Gross," "monstrous," and "scandalous" are not too strong expressions to convey the sentiments of the reviewer. In many instances Macaulay's corrections are just, though his manner of conveying them is rarely in the best taste. But Macaulay wholly fails to give any such broad view of the faults and merits of Croker's per-

[1] Trevelyan, I, 218. [2] Trevelyan, I, 212.
[3] Trevelyan, I, 221.

formance as that embodied in Carlyle's review of the same book: "Diligence, Fidelity, Decency are good and indispensable: yet, without Faculty, without Light, they will not do the work. Along with that Tombstone-information, perhaps even without much of it, we could have liked to gain some answer, in one way or other, to this wide question: What and how was *English Life* in Johnson's time; wherein has ours grown to differ therefrom? In other words: What things have we to forget, what to fancy and remember, before we, from such distance, can put ourselves in Johnson's *place;* and so, in the full sense of the term, *understand* him, his sayings and his doings? This was indeed specially the problem which a Commentator and Editor had to solve: . . . Of all which very little has been attempted here." In comparison with Carlyle's large and penetrating view, Macaulay's strictures, though they show extraordinary care in picking minute flaws, seem not only ill-natured but trivial.

From Croker Macaulay turns his attention to Boswell. Here he had a subject requiring penetration, generosity, and sympathy for hero-worship. For in James Boswell (1740-1795) we have the somewhat remarkable phenomenon of a Scottish advocate of good family and comfortable means who at every opportunity put aside his business in order to undertake a pilgrimage to Johnson's shabby quarters in London, who made it the study of his life to chronicle minutely the conversations in which he and his people were so often "tossed and gored," who has somehow managed, poor-spirited and uncritical though he was, to produce the greatest biographical portrait ever drawn by an English pen. Yet to Macaulay's brisk and positive mind Boswell presents no problem whatever. He was, says Macaulay, a man of the meanest and feeblest intellect, whose book is great precisely because he had no

mind of his own. Does this explanation carry conviction? If it is the correct explanation, any person of mean ability should be able to write a great biography. But although such persons have often tried, none have succeeded. Lockhart's *Scott,* Southey's *Nelson,* Trevelyan's *Macaulay,*— these, with Boswell's *Johnson* at their head, may certainly be called first-rate English biographies. And with equal certainty it may be affirmed that no one except Macaulay has ever found the explanation of such greatness as they represent in the littleness of their authors. We shall do better if, while we allow ourselves to appreciate the cleverness of Macaulay's somewhat exaggerated strictures upon Boswell's weak points, we accept Carlyle's tribute to the intense genuineness of the hero-worship that was hidden away in that foolish creature.

At all events Boswell has made a great book, as even Macaulay ungrudgingly admits. "Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists," he declares, "than Boswell is the first of biographers." And great biographies are not made by worthless creatures or without great pains in composition. Boswell, indeed, has hardly ever been excelled in the richness and fullness of detail with which he bodies forth the conversation and by-play of an intensely human person. To all who may feel inclined to belittle the extreme technical difficulty of Boswell's achievement no better advice can be given than that of the famous Master of Balliol:

"Let any one who believes that an ordinary man can write a great biography make the experiment himself. I would have him try to describe the most interesting dinner-party at which he was ever present: let him try to write down from memory a few of the good things which were said, not forgetting to make an incidental allusion to the good things that were eaten; let him aim at what

I may call the dramatic effect of the party. And then let him compare the result with Boswell's account of the famous dinner at Mr. Dilly's, the bookseller in the Poultry, where Johnson was first introduced to Wilkes, and he will begin to understand the nature of Boswell's genius." [1]

Having introduced his review by disposing of Croker and Boswell, Macaulay turns to Johnson himself. He dwells at length, and with frequent exaggerations, upon the misery of Johnson's early career, which he thinks was begun too late for the patronage of individuals and too early for that of the public. He tells how, in consequence, Johnson for a time lived the miserable life of a Grub Street hack-writer, and how, after some five and twenty years, he secured position, respect, and money. He represents Johnson as an uncouth monster in the midst of a society to whom his manners were wholly strange. He condemns Johnson's style for its Latinized vocabulary, its antitheses, its padding, and its awkward inversions. And then he has something—not much—to say about what a profounder critic would have regarded as the kernel of the subject; namely, Johnson's mind. Johnson's mind, as seen by Macaulay, is extremely vigorous and extremely limited. "The characteristic peculiarity of his intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices." He was, in consequence, able to criticise with justice the scruples of the Puritans, the cant of patriotism, or those literary compositions which were fashioned on his own principles. But for precisely the same reason he was ludicrously unable to perceive his own excessive scruples in religious matters, to recognize the merits of republicanism, or to criticise aright such poets as Shakespeare or

[1] Benjamin Jowett, *Life and Letters*, II, 33.

Milton or Thomson or Gray. It is characteristic of Macaulay that in summing up this brilliant but overdrawn and superficial portrait, he observes that Johnson is "more intimately known to posterity than other men are known to their contemporaries" and then shows us that to his mind Johnson is "intimately known" if we can image to ourselves "that strange figure which is as familiar to us as the figures of those among whom we have been brought up, the gigantic body, the huge massy face, seamed with the scars of disease, the brown coat, the black worsted stockings, the grey wig with the scorched foretop, the dirty hands, the nails bitten and pared to the quick. We see the eyes and mouth moving with convulsive twitches; we see the heavy form rolling; we hear it puffing; and then comes the 'Why, sir!' and the 'What then, sir?' and the 'No, sir!' and the 'You don't see your way through the question, sir!'" Such is the conclusion of this essay by a Whig reviewer writing in his thirty-first year upon the great Tory moralist. In what he says about Boswell and Croker Macaulay reveals the "rage of faction" and the absence of sympathy and penetration. And what he says about Johnson, though much better, is far from adequate: Johnson's wig and nails and dirty linen Macaulay saw with astonishing clearness; what lay beneath that unlovely exterior he saw—if he saw it at all—only through a haze of prejudice.

Life of Johnson.—The biographical essay on Johnson which forms the text of this book was one of five lives contributed by Macaulay to the eighth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.[1] It is a pleasant fact to remember, and characteristic of Macaulay's generosity, that he

[1] The others were Atterbury, Bunyan, Goldsmith, and William Pitt the younger. Of these the first three are much shorter than the Johnson; the Pitt is decidedly longer.

made it a condition of contributing these articles to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that the matter of compensation should not be so much as mentioned.[1] Of the other articles that on Pitt is perhaps the best.

It is instructive to compare the life of Johnson with the review of Croker's edition of Boswell. Half of the earlier essay deals with Croker and Boswell; in the later essay Croker is not mentioned, while Boswell comes in for only a paragraph. The earlier essay was badly proportioned and poorly joined: the departures from the main line of development are frequent and lengthy, the successive points do not grow naturally out of each other, and the paragraphs are, in consequence, badly fitted together. The plan of the later essay is notably good and yet very simple: it is merely to follow Johnson through his life, with pauses for characterization when a new work by Johnson appears or when a new friend becomes influential in his life. The main course of the narrative is never really departed from, and the transitions from paragraph to paragraph are models of coherence.

But the superiority of this biography over the earlier review goes deeper than mere style. As Macaulay grew older, dropped politics, and labored at his *History,* his tone became more moderate, his judgment steadier, his tendency to exaggeration less marked. Undoubtedly there are excesses in the later essay, but they are matters of occasional detail rather than large and fundamental portions of the narrative. To say that Johnson "dressed like a scarecrow and ate like a cormorant" is no doubt absurd. And the paragraphs about poor Tetty and Mrs. Thrale are open to criticism. But happily such passages in the later essay are infrequent.

[1] Trevelyan, II, 376.

A more detailed comparison of the two pieces—which every thorough student will wish to make for himself—will confirm the superiority of Macaulay's later work in fairness, in proportion, and in smoothness and restraint of style. And these remarkable improvements are accomplished without the loss of vigor or any other desirable quality.

IV

MACAULAY'S TEMPER AND STYLE

It would be strange, indeed, if an author who read and talked more than he thought, and who exceedingly disliked being worsted in argument, should be found free from certain faults of style. Particularly in his earlier writings Macaulay is beset by the tendency to make his point at whatever cost. This tendency leads him into certain habits which the student should notice and which he should endeavor to exclude from his own work.

Most conspicuous among these habits is exaggeration. Macaulay dislikes to bother with the few exceptions which prevent a scrupulous writer from saying that a certain thing is universally true. He loves the superlative, he loves universal propositions. Accordingly we find him saying that "Rymer is the worst critic that ever lived," that "never was there a character which it was easier to read than that of Cicero," that "never was there a mind keener or more critical than that of Middleton," that "not one Londoner in a million ever misplaces his *will* and *shall*." These are all universal propositions; a single exception will invalidate them. Careful writers, therefore, employ such language only when they are perfectly sure of their ground. But Macaulay, at least in his earlier writ-

ings, employs such expressions almost constantly. Let the student ponder the tremendous responsibility that a writer assumes in making such assertions as those in the following passage from Macaulay's review of Nares's *Memoirs of Lord Burghley* (1832): "On *every* subject which the professor discusses, he produces *three times as many* pages as another man; and one of his pages is *as tedious as another man's three*. His book is swelled to its vast dimensions by *endless* repetitions, by episodes which have *nothing* to do with the main action, by quotations from books which are in *every* circulating library, and by reflections which, when they happen to be just, are so obvious that they must *necessarily* occur to the mind of *every* reader. He employs more words in expounding and defending a truism, than *any other* writer would employ in supporting a paradox. Of the rules of historical perspective he has *not the faintest notion.*"[1] Such forced generalizations are dangerously frequent on Macaulay's pages; so too are such expressions as "never," "without parallel," "utterly," "always," "in all literature." Often, of course, he uses extravagant language—as when he speaks of Johnson "swallowing his tea in oceans"—in such a way as to show that he does not expect to be taken literally. But the fault is so serious, nevertheless, as to call for mention and for an emphatic warning to any one who may be disposed to imitate Macaulay in this respect.

Akin to this habit of exaggerated and superlative statement is Macaulay's tendency to unfairness in argument. Often this unfairness consists in suppressing the part of the evidence which would disprove a sweeping, universal statement. For instance, Boswell cites a single instance of Johnson's dining, with borrowed money, upon venison and

[1] The italics are not Macaulay's.

champagne. Whereupon Macaulay assures us that whenever he could afford it, Johnson dined in that way. Again, Boswell tells us that Johnson, while at the university, was generally to be seen lounging near the college gate entertaining his fellows, *"if not spiriting them up to rebellion against the college discipline."* Under Macaulay's manipulation Johnson becomes the leader *"in every mutiny* against the discipline of the college."[1] Here Boswell's suspicion, which is strictly not sufficient to permit us to say that Johnson ever incited a single rebellion, is made the basis of a statement that no college rebellion occurred during Johnson's time in which he was not the ringleader.

Two more instances may be cited in which Macaulay misuses his evidence. With regard to a certain class of statements Johnson said: "Do not wholly slight them, because they may be true; but do not easily trust them, because they may be false." On this basis of this perfectly judicial statement Macaulay represents Johnson as "warning his readers not to slight such impressions." In other words, Macaulay suppresses that half of the evidence which contradicts what he wishes to say. Again, we find him, in a letter to Napier written on April 18, 1842, defending himself for certain inelegant expressions which had been objected to in one of his reviews. His defence consists in citing Addison, "the model of pure and graceful writing," in one of whose *Spectator* papers Macaulay says he finds such a slangy phrase as "queer old put." If we turn to the fifth paragraph of *Spectator* 383 we find that as the Spectator and the good Knight are returning from their visit to Spring Garden, they pass some young fellows in a boat, to whom Sir Roger calls out a goodnight. Whereupon "one of them, instead of returning

[1] Again the italics are not Macaulay's.

the civility, asked us what queer old Putt we had in the boat." Addison was, of course, simply making a rude character speak rudely, and Macaulay had no right to use these words as a specimen of Addison's personal taste. One is glad to find that in Macaulay's later essays and in the *History* sins of this kind are less abundant.

Yet, after all, such faults of style as we have been noting are almost inseparable from Macaulay's excellences. Had he not been so enthusiastic as to be in constant danger of exaggeration, Macaulay would have lacked the vigor which is perhaps his principal merit. Had he possessed the kind of mind that is at its best in weighing evidence, he would probably have been at his worst in describing persons, places, battles, and assemblages. As it is, he is at his best in doing just these things.

The chief merits of style which aid Macaulay in securing his effects are his remarkable unity, clearness, and ease.

Macaulay's singleness of effect is partly a result of great care in composition, and partly a result of that habit of mind which makes him neglect exceptions to general rules. Human figures, as he saw them, are almost always animated by a single dominant trait and books are conspicuous for some single quality. So Macaulay's ideas as they formed in his mind could usually be unified without the loss of any details which he valued. And in addition he was a master of the technical resources which, in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, make for unity of form.

This unity is the more remarkable on account of the great mass of illustrative detail by which Macaulay makes his work so clear. His wide reading and unusual memory gave him almost unheard of powers of illustration. In conversation and in his letters, as well as in his more studied writings, he amazed his friends by his ability

to summon from his reading such a cloud of witnesses as to compel admiration and overwhelm disbelief. Over and over again in his writings he develops a paragraph by first making a general statement and then illustrating it by means of copious examples. The second paragraph from the preface to the *Lays of Ancient Rome* is a fair instance: there Macaulay opens his paragraph with the statement that "the early history of Rome is indeed far more poetical than anything else in Latin literature." Then follow more than a score of instances, each phrased as briefly as possible. That is one of Macaulay's great merits: his illustrations are almost always so rapidly enumerated that the reader is enlightened without being fatigued.

This absence of fatigue is also due in part to Macaulay's unusual care in revising his work until it ran with almost perfect smoothness. Hardly any prose is easier to read aloud than Macaulay's. One finds by so reading it that Macaulay's ear was very sensitive to good cadences, that his sentences have just the right rise and fall, that he never neglects the aid that comes from presenting his ideas in pairs or sets which match each other perfectly. Most admirable of all, perhaps, is his skill in making one paragraph grow naturally out of the other by means of those perfectly turned transitional sentences which would of themselves make Macaulay's prose a model for those who wish to learn to write.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF JOHNSON'S LIFE AND TIMES

1702-14. Reign of Queen Anne.
1709. Johnson born at Lichfield (Sept. 18).
1709-10. Steele and Addison's *Tatler.*
1711-12. Steele and Addison's *Spectator.*
1714-27. Reign of George I.
1726. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels.*
1727-60. Reign of George II.
1728. Goldsmith born.
1728. Entered Pembroke College, Oxford. Versified Pope's *Messiah* in Latin.
1729. Burke born.
1729-35. Unsettled. Taught school at Bosworth. Lived at Lichfield and Birmingham.
1735. Married Mrs. Elizabeth (Jarvis) Porter. Taught school at Edial.
1735. Published an abridged translation of Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia.*
1737. Began to live in London.
1738. Contributed to Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine.*
1738. Published *London.*
1740. Boswell born.
1740-43. Reported Parliamentary debates for *Gentleman's Magazine.* ("Reports of the Debates of the Senate of Lilliput.")
1743. Savage died.
1744. Published *Life of Richard Savage.* Pope died.
1745. Published proposals for a new edition of Shakespeare. Swift died.
1747. Published *Plan for a Dictionary of the English Language, addressed to Philip Dormer, Earl of Chesterfield.*
1749. Published *The Vanity of Human Wishes, being the Tenth Satire of Juvenal Imitated.*

1749. Published *Irene.* (Acted in 1748.)
1750-52. Published the *Rambler* (all except five papers are by Johnson).
1752. Death of Johnson's wife.
1753-54. Published certain papers in the *Adventurer.*
1755. Letter to Chesterfield. Published the *Dictionary.*
1758-60. Published the *Idler* (all except twelve papers are by Johnson).
1759. Death of Johnson's mother. Published *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.*
1760-1820. Reign of George III.
1762. Received pension.
1763. Met Boswell.
1764. "The Club" founded.
1765. Published *Plays of William Shakespeare, with Notes.*
1766. Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* published.
1770. Published *The False Alarm.*
1774. Published *The Patriot.*
1775. Published *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland,* and *Taxation no Tyranny.* Received LL.D. from Oxford.
1779-81. Published *Lives of the English Poets.*
1781. Thrale died.
1784. Mrs. Thrale married Piozzi.
1784. Johnson died (December 13) and was buried (December 20) in Westminster Abbey.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The result of a careful reading of Macaulay's essay on Johnson should be to arouse interest in the works, personalities, and surroundings of Johnson himself, of Boswell and the other intimate friends of Johnson, and of Macaulay.

Concerning Johnson it is to be hoped that many will wish to read far more than they can find in this little volume. Let such, if they have access to a large library, look up the splendid edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* by George Birkbeck Hill (six volumes, Clarendon Press, Oxford, or Harper and Brothers, New York). There is a good cheap edition of Boswell, which almost any one can own, in "Everyman's Library" (two volumes). Johnson's complete works are not in print, but there is an excellent volume of selections from his works edited by Professor C. G. Osgood (Henry Holt and Company). The same publishers issue *Johnson's Chief Lives of the Poets,* to which is added Carlyle's essay on Boswell's *Life.* There is a brief but good account of Johnson's life by Sir Leslie Stephen in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and a fuller biography, from the same expert hand, in the "English Men of Letters" series.

Of Boswell there are biographies by Percy Fitzgerald (two volumes, London, 1891) and by W. K. Leask (Edinburgh, 1897, in the "Famous Scots" series). A good short sketch is that by Sir Leslie Stephen in the *Dictionary of National Biography.* There is interesting comment on Boswell and Johnson in Whitwell Elwin's *Some*

XVIII Century Men of Letters, London, 1902, II, 237 and following ("Boswell and Dr. Johnson") and in Austin Dobson's *Miscellanies* ("Boswell's Predecessors and Editors").

For Macaulay we are fortunate in having the admirable *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* by his nephew, Sir George Otto Trevelyan, of which there is a cheap reprint in one volume published by Harper and Brothers. An unusually just and thorough short life is J. Cotter Morison's in the "English Men of Letters" series. The third chapter (on Macaulay's essays) is particularly useful in connection with the study of this book.

To have read thus far is to have made some acquaintance with considerable portions of English literature in two important periods,—the period of Johnson and the period of Macaulay. Yet this is but the beginning of a course of reading which, starting from Macaulay's essay on Johnson, might extend much further than school requirements necessitate or than school terms permit.

Such a course of reading might, for instance, take the form of a study of Johnson's contemporaries, such as Fielding, Richardson, Goldsmith, Gray, Sheridan, Horace Walpole, Reynolds, and Gibbon. Seccombe's *Age of Johnson,* or Sir Leslie Stephen's *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century,* briefly indicates the place which each of these men holds in the literature of the period. The biography of each in the *Dictionary of National Biography* includes a list of each man's writings and the principal sources of information concerning him. To begin by finding out from Boswell's *Life* what place these men held in the estimation of Johnson, and then, after reading liberally in the authors themselves, to ask one's self if Johnson's opinions are well founded,—this is to approach eighteenth-century literature from a standpoint

at once definite and stimulating. In such a course of reading too much attention should not be paid to secondary authorities, yet some use may be made of Courthope's *History of English Poetry* (the fifth volume), of Nathan Drake's *Essays Illustrative of the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler,* and of Cross's or Raleigh's history of the English novel. Long before all this has been done, innumerable questions will have presented themselves. Are the works of Johnson a fair sample of the literature of his time? If there are tendencies of his time with which he is not in sympathy, what are they and what are the grounds of his dislike? Why should Johnson have felt as he did about Gray? About Milton? What would Johnson have thought about Sir Walter Scott?

Or, starting not from the subject of Macaulay's essay but from the author, one may desire to know more of Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, Horner, Brougham, and the other contributors to the *Edinburgh Review.* Gates's *Selections* from Jeffrey ("Athenæum Press Series") has an admirable critical introduction, which carries one squarely into the midst of this interesting field. Did all the "Edinburgh Reviewers" write like Macaulay? Do any of them show better judgment than he? Wider reading? Does their critical work reveal their political inclinations? In what respects? Are Macaulay's early essays different from his later ones?

Again, an author as closely bound up as Johnson was with the life and scenes of London can hardly be understood without some such knowledge of London in the eighteenth century as is furnished by Traill's *Social England,* or Ashton's *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne,* or Wheatley's *London, Past and Present.* Baedeker's *London* and his *Great Britain* should be in the school library and maps and dictionaries should be close at hand.

Thomas Babington Macaulay

MACAULAY'S LIFE OF JOHNSON

Coffee-room in Cheshire Cheese Inn
(Johnson's favorite seat under his portrait)

LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

1. Samuel Johnson, one of the most eminent English writers of the eighteenth century, was the son of Michael Johnson, who was, at the beginning of that century, a magistrate of Lichfield, and a bookseller of great note in the midland counties. Michael's abilities and attainments seem to have been considerable. He was so well acquainted with the contents of the volumes which he exposed to sale, that the country rectors of Staffordshire and Worcestershire thought him an oracle on points of learning. Between him and the clergy, indeed, there was a strong religious and political sympathy. He was a zealous churchman, and, though he had qualified himself for municipal office by taking the oaths to the sovereigns in possession, was to the last a Jacobite in heart. At his house, a house which is still pointed out to every traveler

who visits Lichfield, Samuel was born on the 18th of September, 1709. In the child, the physical, intellectual, and moral peculiarities which afterwards distinguished the man were plainly discernible: great muscular strength accompanied by much awkwardness and many infirmities; great quickness of parts, with a morbid propensity to sloth and procrastination; a kind and generous heart, with a gloomy and irritable temper. He had inherited from his ancestors a scrofulous taint, which it was beyond the power of medicine to remove. His parents were weak enough to believe that the royal touch was a specific for this malady. In his third year he was taken up to London, inspected by the court surgeon, prayed over by the court chaplains, and stroked and presented with a piece of gold by Queen Anne. One of his earliest recollections was that of a stately lady in a diamond stomacher and a long black hood. Her hand was applied in vain. The boy's features, which were originally noble and not irregular, were distorted by his malady. His cheeks were deeply scarred. He lost for a time the sight of one eye; and he saw but very imperfectly with the other. But the force of his mind overcame every impediment. Indolent as he was, he acquired knowledge with such ease and rapidity that at every school to which he was sent he was soon the best scholar. From sixteen to eighteen he resided at home, and was left to his own devices. He learned much at this time, though his studies were without guidance and without plan. He ransacked his father's shelves, dipped into a multitude of books, read what was interesting, and passed over what was dull. An ordinary lad would have acquired little or no useful knowledge in such a way: but much that was dull to ordinary lads was interesting to Samuel. He read little Greek; for his proficiency in that language was not such that he could take

much pleasure in the masters of Attic poetry and eloquence. But he had left school a good Latinist; and he soon acquired, in the large and miscellaneous library of which he now had the command, an extensive knowledge of Latin literature. That Augustan delicacy of taste which is the boast of the great public schools of England he never possessed. But he was early familiar with some classical writers who were quite unknown to the best scholars in the sixth form at Eton. He was peculiarly attracted by the works of the great restorers of learning. Once, while searching for some apples, he found a huge folio volume of Petrarch's works. The name excited his curiosity; and he eagerly devoured hundreds of pages. Indeed, the diction and versification of his own Latin compositions show that he had paid at least as much attention to modern copies from the antique as to the original models.

2. While he was thus irregularly educating himself, his family was sinking into hopeless poverty. Old Michael Johnson was much better qualified to pore upon books, and to talk about them, than to trade in them. His business declined; his debts increased; it was with difficulty that the daily expenses of his household were defrayed. It was out of his power to support his son at either university; but a wealthy neighbor offered assistance; and, in reliance on promises which proved to be of very little value, Samuel was entered at Pembroke College, Oxford. When the young scholar presented himself to the rulers of that society, they were amazed not more by his ungainly figure and eccentric manners than by the quantity of extensive and curious information which he had picked up during many months of desultory but not unprofitable study. On the first day of his residence he surprised his teachers by quoting Macrobius; and one of the most

learned among them declared that he had never known a freshman of equal attainments.

3. At Oxford, Johnson resided during about three years. He was poor, even to raggedness; and his appearance excited a mirth and a pity which were equally intolerable to his haughty spirit. He was driven from the quadrangle of Christ Church by the sneering looks which the members of that aristocratical society cast at the holes in his shoes. Some charitable person placed a new pair at his door; but he spurned them away in a fury. Distress made him, not servile, but reckless and ungovernable. No opulent gentleman commoner, panting for one-and-twenty, could have treated the academical authorities with more gross disrespect. The needy scholar was generally to be seen under the gate of Pembroke, a gate now adorned with his effigy, haranguing a circle of lads, over whom, in spite of his tattered gown and dirty linen, his wit and audacity gave him an undisputed ascendency. In every mutiny against the discipline of the college he was the ringleader. Much was pardoned, however, to a youth so highly distinguished by abilities and acquirements. He had early made himself known by turning Pope's *Messiah* into Latin verse. The style and rhythm, indeed, were not exactly Virgilian; but the translation found many admirers, and was read with pleasure by Pope himself.

4. The time drew near at which Johnson would, in the ordinary course of things, have become a Bachelor of Arts; but he was at the end of his resources. Those promises of support on which he had relied had not been kept. His family could do nothing for him. His debts to Oxford tradesmen were small indeed, yet larger than he could pay. In the autumn of 1731, he was under the necessity of quitting the university without a degree. In the following winter his father died. The old man left but a pit-

tance; and of that pittance almost the whole was appropriated to the support of his widow. The property to which Samuel succeeded amounted to no more than twenty pounds.

5. His life, during the thirty years which followed, was one hard struggle with poverty. The misery of that struggle needed no aggravation, but was aggravated by the sufferings of an unsound body and an unsound mind. Before the young man left the university, his hereditary malady had broken forth in a singularly cruel form. He had become an incurable hypochondriac. He said long after that he had been mad all his life, or at least not perfectly sane; and, in truth, eccentricities less strange than his have often been thought grounds sufficient for absolving felons, and for setting aside wills. His grimaces, his gestures, his mutterings, sometimes diverted and sometimes terrified people who did not know him. At a dinner table he would, in a fit of absence, stoop down and twitch off a lady's shoe. He would amaze a drawing-room by suddenly ejaculating a clause of the Lord's Prayer. He would conceive an unintelligible aversion to a particular alley, and perform a great circuit rather than see the hateful place. He would set his heart on touching every post in the streets through which he walked. If by any chance he missed a post, he would go back a hundred yards and repair the omission. Under the influence of his disease, his senses became morbidly torpid, and his imagination morbidly active. At one time he would stand poring on the town clock without being able to tell the hour. At another, he would distinctly hear his mother, who was many miles off, calling him by his name. But this was not the worst. A deep melancholy took possession of him, and gave a dark tinge to all his views of human nature and of human destiny. Such wretched-

ness as he endured has driven many men to shoot themselves or drown themselves. But he was under no temptation to commit suicide. He was sick of life; but he was afraid of death; and he shuddered at every sight or sound which reminded him of the inevitable hour. In religion he found but little comfort during his long and frequent fits of dejection; for his religion partook of his own character. The light from heaven shone on him indeed, but not in a direct line, or with its own pure splendor. The rays had to struggle through a disturbing medium; they reached him refracted, dulled and discolored by the thick gloom which had settled on his soul; and, though they might be sufficiently clear to guide him, were too dim to cheer him.

6. With such infirmities of body and mind, this celebrated man was left, at two-and-twenty, to fight his way through the world. He remained during about five years in the midland counties. At Lichfield, his birthplace and his early home, he had inherited some friends and acquired others. He was kindly noticed by Henry Hervey, a gay officer of noble family, who happened to be quartered there. Gilbert Walmesley, registrar of the ecclesiastical court of the diocese, a man of distinguished parts, learning, and knowledge of the world, did himself honor by patronizing the young adventurer, whose repulsive person, unpolished manners, and squalid garb moved many of the petty aristocracy of the neighborhood to laughter or to disgust. At Lichfield, however, Johnson could find no way of earning a livelihood. He became usher of a grammar school in Leicestershire; he resided as a humble companion in the house of a country gentleman; but a life of dependence was insupportable to his haughty spirit. He repaired to Birmingham, and there earned a few guineas by literary drudgery. In that town he printed a transla-

tion, little noticed at the time, and long forgotten, of a Latin book about Abyssinia. He then put forth proposals for publishing by subscription the poems of Politian, with notes containing a history of modern Latin verse: but subscriptions did not come in; and the volume never appeared.

7. While leading this vagrant and miserable life, Johnson fell in love. The object of his passion was Mrs. Elizabeth Porter, a widow who had children as old as himself. To ordinary spectators, the lady appeared to be a short, fat, coarse woman, painted half an inch thick, dressed in gaudy colors, and fond of exhibiting provincial airs and graces which were not exactly those of the Queensberrys and Lepels. To Johnson, however, whose passions were strong, whose eyesight was too weak to distinguish ceruse from natural bloom, and who had seldom or never been in the same room with a woman of real fashion, his Titty, as he called her, was the most beautiful, graceful, and accomplished of her sex. That his admiration was unfeigned cannot be doubted; for she was as poor as himself. She accepted, with a readiness which did her little honor, the addresses of a suitor who might have been her son. The marriage, however, in spite of occasional wranglings, proved happier than might have been expected. The lover continued to be under the illusions of the wedding-day till the lady died in her sixty-fourth year. On her monument he placed an inscription extolling the charms of her person and of her manners; and when, long after her decease, he had occasion to mention her, he exclaimed, with a tenderness half ludicrous, half pathetic, "Pretty creature!"

8. His marriage made it necessary for him to exert himself more strenuously than he had hitherto done. He took a house in the neighborhood of his native town, and ad-

vertised for pupils. But eighteen months passed away; and only three pupils came to his academy. Indeed, his appearance was so strange, and his temper so violent, that his schoolroom must have resembled an ogre's den. Nor was the tawdry painted grandmother whom he called his Titty well qualified to make provision for the comfort of young gentlemen. David Garrick, who was one of the pupils, used, many years later, to throw the best company of London into convulsions of laughter by mimicking the endearments of this extraordinary pair.

9. At length Johnson, in the twenty-eighth year of his age, determined to seek his fortune in the capital as a literary adventurer. He set out with a few guineas, three acts of the tragedy of *Irene* in manuscript, and two or three letters of introduction from his friend Walmesley.

10. Never, since literature became a calling in England, had it been a less gainful calling than at the time when Johnson took up his residence in London. In the preceding generation a writer of eminent merit was sure to be munificently rewarded by the government. The least that he could expect was a pension or a sinecure place; and, if he showed any aptitude for politics, he might hope to be a member of parliament, a lord of the treasury, an ambassador, a secretary of state. It would be easy, on the other hand, to name several writers of the nineteenth century of whom the least successful has received forty thousand pounds from the booksellers. But Johnson entered on his vocation in the most dreary part of the dreary interval which separated two ages of prosperity. Literature had ceased to flourish under the patronage of the great, and had not begun to flourish under the patronage of the public. One man of letters, indeed, Pope, had acquired by his pen what was then considered as a handsome

fortune, and lived on a footing of equality with nobles and ministers of state. But this was a solitary exception. Even an author whose reputation was established, and whose works were popular, such an author as Thomson, whose *Seasons* were in every library, such an author as Fielding, whose *Pasquin* had had a greater run than any drama since *The Beggar's Opera,* was sometimes glad to obtain, by pawning his best coat, the means of dining on tripe at a cookshop underground, where he could wipe his hands, after his greasy meal, on the back of a Newfoundland dog. It is easy, therefore, to imagine what humiliations and privations must have awaited the novice who had still to earn a name. One of the publishers to whom Johnson applied for employment measured with a scornful eye that athletic though uncouth frame, and exclaimed, "You had better get a porter's knot, and carry trunks." Nor was the advice bad; for a porter was likely to be as plentifully fed, and as comfortably lodged, as a poet.

11. Some time appears to have elapsed before Johnson was able to form any literary connection from which he could expect more than bread for the day which was passing over him. He never forgot the generosity with which Hervey, who was now residing in London, relieved his wants during this time of trial. "Harry Hervey," said the old philosopher many years later, "was a vicious man; but he was very kind to me. If you call a dog Hervey I shall love him." At Hervey's table Johnson sometimes enjoyed feasts which were made more agreeable by contrast. But in general he dined, and thought that he dined well, on sixpennyworth of meat, and a pennyworth of bread, at an alehouse near Drury Lane.

12. The effect of the privations and sufferings which

he endured at this time was discernible to the last in his temper and his deportment. His manners had never been courtly. They now became almost savage. Being frequently under the necessity of wearing shabby coats and dirty shirts, he became a confirmed sloven. Being often very hungry when he sat down to his meals, he contracted a habit of eating with ravenous greediness. Even to the end of his life, and even at the tables of the great, the sight of food affected him as it affects wild beasts and birds of prey. His taste in cookery, formed in subterranean ordinaries and alamode beefshops, was far from delicate. Whenever he was so fortunate as to have near him a hare that had been kept too long, or a meat pie made with rancid butter, he gorged himself with such violence that his veins swelled, and the moisture broke out on his forehead. The affronts which his poverty emboldened stupid and low-minded men to offer to him would have broken a mean spirit into sycophancy, but made him rude even to ferocity. Unhappily the insolence which, while it was defensive, was pardonable, and in some sense respectable, accompanied him into societies where he was treated with courtesy and kindness. He was repeatedly provoked into striking those who had taken liberties with him. All the sufferers, however, were wise enough to abstain from talking about their beatings, except Osborne, the most rapacious and brutal of booksellers, who proclaimed everywhere that he had been knocked down by the huge fellow whom he had hired to puff the Harleian Library.

13. About a year after Johnson had begun to reside in London, he was fortunate enough to obtain regular employment from Cave, an enterprising and intelligent bookseller, who was proprietor and editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. That journal, just entering on the ninth

year of its long existence, was the only periodical work in the kingdom which then had what would now be called a large circulation. It was, indeed, the chief source of parliamentary intelligence. It was not then safe, even during a recess, to publish an account of the proceedings of either House without some disguise. Cave, however, ventured to entertain his readers with what he called "Reports of the Debates of the Senate of Lilliput," France was Blefuscu; London was Mildendo: pounds were sprugs: the Duke of Newcastle was the Nardac Secretary of State: Lord Hardwicke was the Hurgo Hickrad; and William Pulteney was Wingul Pulnub. To write the speeches was, during several years, the business of Johnson. He was generally furnished with notes, meager indeed, and inaccurate, of what had been said; but sometimes he had to find arguments and eloquence both for the ministry and for the opposition. He was himself a Tory, not from rational conviction—for his serious opinion was that one form of government was just as good or as bad as another—but from mere passion, such as inflamed the Capulets against the Montagues, or the Blues of the Roman circus against the Greens. In his infancy he had heard so much talk about the villanies of the Whigs, and the dangers of the Church, that he had become a furious partisan when he could scarcely speak. Before he was three he had insisted on being taken to hear Sacheverell preach at Lichfield Cathedral, and had listened to the sermon with as much respect, and probably with as much intelligence, as any Staffordshire squire in the congregation. The work which had been begun in the nursery had been completed by the university. Oxford, when Johnson resided there, was the most Jacobitical place in England; and Pembroke was one of the most Jacobitical colleges in Oxford. The prejudices which he

brought up to London were scarcely less absurd than those of his own Tom Tempest. Charles II and James II were two of the best kings that ever reigned. Laud, a poor creature who never did, said, or wrote anything indicating more than the ordinary capacity of an old woman, was a prodigy of parts and learning over whose tomb Art and Genius still continued to weep. Hampden deserved no more honorable name than that of "the zealot of rebellion." Even the ship money, condemned not less decidedly by Falkland and Clarendon than by the bitterest Roundheads, Johnson would not pronounce to have been an unconstitutional impost. Under a government, the mildest that had ever been known in the world—under a government which allowed to the people an unprecedented liberty of speech and action—he fancied that he was a slave; he assailed the ministry with obloquy which refuted itself, and regretted the lost freedom and happiness of those golden days in which a writer who had taken but one-tenth part of the license allowed to him would have been pilloried, mangled with the shears, whipped at the cart's tail, and flung into a noisome dungeon to die. He hated dissenters and stock-jobbers, the excise and the army, septennial parliaments, and continental connections. He long had an aversion to the Scotch, an aversion of which he could not remember the commencement, but which, he owned, had probably originated in his abhorrence of the conduct of the nation during the Great Rebellion. It is easy to guess in what manner debates on great party questions were likely to be reported by a man whose judgment was so much disordered by party spirit. A show of fairness was indeed necessary to the prosperity of the Magazine. But Johnson long afterwards owned that, though he had saved appearances, he had taken care that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it; and, in fact, every passage

which has lived, every passage which bears the marks of his higher faculties, is put into the mouth of some member of the opposition.

14. A few weeks after Johnson had entered on these obscure labors, he published a work which at once placed him high among the writers of his age. It is probable that what he had suffered during his first year in London had often reminded him of some parts of that noble poem in which Juvenal had described the misery and degradation of a needy man of letters, lodged among the pigeons' nests in the tottering garrets which overhung the streets of Rome. Pope's admirable imitations of Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* had recently appeared, were in every hand, and were by many readers thought superior to the originals. What Pope had done for Horace, Johnson aspired to do for Juvenal. The enterprise was bold, and yet judicious. For between Johnson and Juvenal there was much in common, much more certainly than between Pope and Horace.

15. Johnson's *London* appeared without his name in May 1738. He received only ten guineas for this stately and vigorous poem: but the sale was rapid, and the success complete. A second edition was required within a week. Those small critics who are always desirous to lower established reputations ran about proclaiming that the anonymous satirist was superior to Pope in Pope's own peculiar department of literature. It ought to be remembered, to the honor of Pope, that he joined heartily in the applause with which the appearance of a rival genius was welcomed. He made inquiries about the author of *London*. Such a man, he said, could not long be concealed. The name was soon discovered; and Pope, with great kindness, exerted himself to obtain an academical degree and the mastership of a grammar school

for the poor young poet. The attempt failed, and Johnson remained a bookseller's hack.

16. It does not appear that these two men, the most eminent writer of the generation which was going out, and the most eminent writer of the generation which was coming in, ever saw each other. They lived in very different circles, one surrounded by dukes and earls, the other by starving pamphleteers and indexmakers. Among Johnson's associates at this time may be mentioned Boyse, who, when his shirts were pledged, scrawled Latin verses sitting up in bed with his arms through two holes in his blanket, who composed very respectable sacred poetry when he was sober, and who was at last run over by a hackney coach when he was drunk; Hoole, surnamed the metaphysical tailor, who, instead of attending to his measures, used to trace geometrical diagrams on the board where he sate cross-legged; and the penitent impostor, George Psalmanazar, who, after poring all day, in a humble lodging, on the folios of Jewish rabbis and Christian fathers, indulged himself at night with literary and theological conversation at an alehouse in the city. But the most remarkable of the persons with whom at this time Johnson consorted was Richard Savage, an earl's son, a shoemaker's apprentice, who had seen life in all its forms, who had feasted among blue ribands in Saint James's Square, and had lain with fifty pounds' weight of iron on his legs in the condemned ward of Newgate. This man had, after many vicissitudes of fortune, sunk at last into abject and hopeless poverty. His pen had failed him. His patrons had been taken away by death, or estranged by the riotous profusion with which he squandered their bounty, and the ungrateful insolence with which he rejected their advice. He now lived by begging. He dined on venison and champagne whenever he had been so fortu-

nate as to borrow a guinea. If his questing had been unsuccessful, he appeased the rage of hunger with some scraps of broken meat, and lay down to rest under the Piazza of Covent Garden in warm weather, and, in cold weather, as near as he could get to the furnace of a glass house. Yet, in his misery, he was still an agreeable companion. He had an inexhaustible store of anecdotes about the gay and brilliant world from which he was now an outcast. He had observed the great men of both parties in hours of careless relaxation, had seen the leaders of opposition without the mask of patriotism, and had heard the prime minister roar with laughter and tell stories not over decent. During some months Savage lived in the closest familiarity with Johnson; and then the friends parted, not without tears. Johnson remained in London to drudge for Cave. Savage went to the West of England, lived there as he had lived everywhere, and, in 1743, died, penniless and heart-broken, in Bristol jail.

17. Soon after his death, while the public curiosity was strongly excited about his extraordinary character, and his not less extraordinary adventures, a life of him appeared widely different from the catchpenny lives of eminent men which were then a staple article of manufacture in Grub Street. The style was indeed deficient in ease and variety; and the writer was evidently too partial to the Latin element of our language. But the little work, with all its faults, was a masterpiece. No finer specimen of literary biography existed in any language, living or dead; and a discerning critic might have confidently predicted that the author was destined to be the founder of a new school of English eloquence.

18. The *Life of Savage* was anonymous; but it was well known in literary circles that Johnson was the writer. During the three years which followed, he pro-

duced no important work; but he was not, and indeed could not be, idle. The fame of his abilities and learning continued to grow. Warburton pronounced him a man of parts and genius; and the praise of Warburton was then no light thing. Such was Johnson's reputation that, in 1747, several eminent booksellers combined to employ him in the arduous work of preparing a *Dictionary of the English Language,* in two folio volumes. The sum which they agreed to pay him was only fifteen hundred guineas; and out of this sum he had to pay several poor men of letters who assisted him in the humbler parts of his task.

19. The prospectus of the *Dictionary* he addressed to the Earl of Chesterfield. Chesterfield had long been celebrated for the politeness of his manners, the brilliancy of his wit, and the delicacy of his taste. He was acknowledged to be the finest speaker in the House of Lords. He had recently governed Ireland, at a momentous conjuncture, with eminent firmness, wisdom, and humanity; and he had since become Secretary of State. He received Johnson's homage with the most winning affability, and requited it with a few guineas, bestowed doubtless in a very graceful manner, but was by no means desirous to see all his carpets blackened with the London mud, and his soups and wines thrown to right and left over the gowns of fine ladies and the waistcoats of fine gentlemen, by an absent, awkward scholar, who gave strange starts and uttered strange growls, who dressed like a scarecrow, and ate like a cormorant. During some time Johnson continued to call on his patron, but after being repeatedly told by the porter that his lordship was not at home, took the hint, and ceased to present himself at the inhospitable door.

20. Johnson had flattered himself that he should have completed his *Dictionary* by the end of 1750; but it

was not till 1755 that he at length gave his huge volumes to the world. During the seven years which he passed in the drudgery of penning definitions and marking quotations for transcription, he sought for relaxation in literary labor of a more agreeable kind. In 1749 he published *The Vanity of Human Wishes,* an excellent imitation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal. It is in truth not easy to say whether the palm belongs to the ancient or to the modern poet. The couplets in which the fall of Wolsey is described, though lofty and sonorous, are feeble when compared with the wonderful lines which bring before us all Rome in tumult on the day of the fall of Sejanus, the laurels on the doorposts, the white bull stalking towards the Capitol, the statues rolling down from their pedestals, the flatterers of the disgraced minister running to see him dragged with a hook through the streets, and to have a kick at his carcass before it is hurled into the Tiber. It must be owned too that in the concluding passage the Christian moralist has not made the most of his advantages, and has fallen decidedly short of the sublimity of his pagan model. On the other hand, Juvenal's Hannibal must yield to Johnson's Charles; and Johnson's vigorous and pathetic enumeration of the miseries of a literary life must be allowed to be superior to Juvenal's lamentation over the fate of Demosthenes and Cicero.

21. For the copyright of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* Johnson received only fifteen guineas.

22. A few days after the publication of this poem, his tragedy, begun many years before, was brought on the stage. His pupil, David Garrick, had, in 1741, made his appearance on a humble stage in Goodman's Fields, had at once risen to the first place among actors, and was now, after several years of almost uninterrupted success, manager of Drury Lane Theater. The relation between him

and his old preceptor was of a very singular kind. They repelled each other strongly, and yet attracted each other strongly. Nature had made them of very different clay; and circumstances had fully brought out the natural peculiarities of both. Sudden prosperity had turned Garrick's head. Continued adversity had soured Johnson's temper. Johnson saw with more envy than became so great a man the villa, the plate, the china, the Brussels carpet, which the little mimic had got by repeating, with grimaces and gesticulations, what wiser men had written; and the exquisitely sensitive vanity of Garrick was galled by the thought that, while all the rest of the world was applauding him, he could obtain from one morose cynic, whose opinion it was impossible to despise, scarcely any compliment not acidulated with scorn. Yet the two Lichfield men had so many early recollections in common, and sympathized with each other on so many points on which they sympathized with nobody else in the vast population of the capital, that, though the master was often provoked by the monkey-like impertinence of the pupil, and the pupil by the bearish rudeness of the master, they remained friends till they were parted by death. Garrick now brought *Irene* out, with alterations sufficient to displease the author, yet not sufficient to make the piece pleasing to the audience. The public, however, listened with little emotion, but with much civility, to five acts of monotonous declamation. After nine representations the play was withdrawn. It is, indeed, altogether unsuited to the stage, and, even when perused in the closet, will be found hardly worthy of the author. He had not the slightest notion of what blank verse should be. A change in the last syllable of every other line would make the versification of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* closely resemble the versification of *Irene*. The poet, however, cleared, by his benefit

nights, and by the sale of the copyright of his tragedy, about three hundred pounds, then a great sum in his estimation.

23. About a year after the representation of *Irene,* he began to publish a series of short essays on morals, manners, and literature. This species of composition had been brought into fashion by the success of the *Tatler,* and by the still more brilliant success of the *Spectator.* A crowd of small writers had vainly attempted to rival Addison. The *Lay Monastery,* the *Censor,* the *Free-Thinker,* the *Plain Dealer,* the *Champion,* and other works of the same kind, had had their short day. None of them had obtained a permanent place in our literature; and they are now to be found only in the libraries of the curious. At length Johnson undertook the adventure in which so many aspirants had failed. In the thirty-sixth year after the appearance of the last number of the *Spectator* appeared the first number of the *Rambler.* From March 1750 to March 1752, this paper continued to come out every Tuesday and Saturday.

24. From the first the *Rambler* was enthusiastically admired by a few eminent men. Richardson, when only five numbers had appeared, pronounced it equal, if not superior, to the *Spectator.* Young and Hartley expressed their approbation not less warmly. Bubb Dodington, among whose many faults indifference to the claims of genius and learning cannot be reckoned, solicited the acquaintance of the writer. In consequence probably of the good offices of Dodington, who was then the confidential adviser of Prince Frederic, two of his Royal Highness's gentlemen carried a gracious message to the printing office, and ordered seven copies for Leicester House. But these overtures seem to have been very coldly received. Johnson had had enough of the patronage of

the great to last him all his life, and was not disposed to haunt any other door as he had haunted the door of Chesterfield.

25. By the public the *Rambler* was at first very coldly received. Though the price of a number was only twopence, the sale did not amount to five hundred. The profits were therefore very small. But as soon as the flying leaves were collected and reprinted they became popular. The author lived to see thirteen thousand copies spread over England alone. Separate editions were published for the Scotch and Irish markets. A large party pronounced the style perfect, so absolutely perfect that in some essays it would be impossible for the writer himself to alter a single word for the better. Another party, not less numerous, vehemently accused him of having corrupted the purity of the English tongue. The best critics admitted that his diction was too monotonous, too obviously artificial, and now and then turgid even to absurdity. But they did justice to the acuteness of his observations on morals and manners, to the constant precision and frequent brilliancy of his language, to the weighty and magnificent eloquence of many serious passages, and to the solemn yet pleasing humor of some of the lighter papers. On the question of precedence between Addison and Johnson, a question which, seventy years ago, was much disputed, posterity has pronounced a decision from which there is no appeal. Sir Roger, his chaplain and his butler, Will Wimble and Will Honeycomb, the Vision of Mirza, the Journal of the Retired Citizen, the Everlasting Club, the Dunmow Flitch, the Loves of Hilpah and Shalum, the Visit to the Exchange, and the Visit to the Abbey, are known to everybody. But many men and women, even of highly cultivated minds, are unacquainted with Squire Bluster and Mrs. Busy, Quisquilius

and Venustulus, the Allegory of Wit and Learning, the Chronicle of the Revolutions of a Garret, and the sad fate of Aningait and Ajut.

26. The last *Rambler* was written in a sad and gloomy hour. Mrs. Johnson had been given over by the physicians. Three days later she died. She left her husband almost broken-hearted. Many people had been surprised to see a man of his genius and learning stooping to every drudgery, and denying himself almost every comfort, for the purpose of supplying a silly, affected old woman with superfluities, which she accepted with but little gratitude. But all his affection had been concentrated on her. He had neither brother nor sister, neither son nor daughter. To him she was beautiful as the Gunnings, and witty as Lady Mary. Her opinion of his writings was more important to him than the voice of the pit of Drury Lane Theater or the judgment of the *Monthly Review*. The chief support which had sustained him through the most arduous labor of his life was the hope that she would enjoy the fame and the profit which he anticipated from his *Dictionary*. She was gone; and in that vast labyrinth of streets, peopled by eight hundred thousand human beings, he was alone. Yet it was necessary for him to set himself, as he expressed it, doggedly to work. After three more laborious years, the *Dictionary* was at length complete.

27. It had been generally supposed that this great work would be dedicated to the eloquent and accomplished nobleman to whom the prospectus had been addressed. He well knew the value of such a compliment; and therefore, when the day of publication drew near, he exerted himself to soothe, by a show of zealous and at the same time of delicate and judicious kindness, the pride which he had so cruelly wounded. Since the *Ramblers* had ceased to appear, the town had been entertained by a journal called

the *World,* to which many men of high rank and fashion contributed. In two successive numbers of the *World* the *Dictionary* was, to use the modern phrase, puffed with wonderful skill. The writings of Johnson were warmly praised. It was proposed that he should be invested with the authority of a Dictator, nay, of a Pope, over our language, and that his decisions about the meaning and the spelling of words should be received as final. His two folios, it was said, would of course be bought by everybody who could afford to buy them. It was soon known that these papers were written by Chesterfield. But the just resentment of Johnson was not to be so appeased. In a letter written with singular energy and dignity of thought and language, he repelled the tardy advances of his patron. The *Dictionary* came forth without a dedication. In the preface the author truly declared that he owed nothing to the great, and described the difficulties with which he had been left to struggle so forcibly and pathetically that the ablest and most malevolent of all the enemies of his fame, Horne Tooke, never could read that passage without tears.

28. The public, on this occasion, did Johnson full justice, and something more than justice. The best lexicographer may well be content if his productions are received by the world with cold esteem. But Johnson's *Dictionary* was hailed with an enthusiasm such as no similar work has ever excited. It was indeed the first dictionary which could be read with pleasure. The definitions show so much acuteness of thought and command of language, and the passages quoted from poets, divines, and philosophers are so skilfully selected, that a leisure hour may always be very agreeably spent in turning over the pages. The faults of the book resolve themselves, for the most part, into one great fault. Johnson was a wretched

etymologist. He knew little or nothing of any Teutonic language except English, which indeed, as he wrote it, was scarcely a Teutonic language; and thus he was absolutely at the mercy of Junius and Skinner.

29. The *Dictionary,* though it raised Johnson's fame, added nothing to his pecuniary means. The fifteen hundred guineas which the booksellers had agreed to pay him had been advanced and spent before the last sheets issued from the press. It is painful to relate that, twice in the course of the year which followed the publication of this great work, he was arrested and carried to spunging-houses, and that he was twice indebted for his liberty to his excellent friend Richardson. It was still necessary for the man who had been formally saluted by the highest authority as Dictator of the English language to supply his wants by constant toil. He abridged his *Dictionary.* He proposed to bring out an edition of Shakespeare by subscription; and many subscribers sent in their names and laid down their money; but he soon found the task so little to his taste that he turned to more attractive employments. He contributed many papers to a new monthly journal, which was called the *Literary Magazine.* Few of these papers have much interest; but among them was the very best thing that he ever wrote, a masterpiece both of reasoning and of satirical pleasantry, the review of Jenyns's *Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil.*

30. In the spring of 1758 Johnson put forth the first of a series of essays, entitled *The Idler.* During two years these essays continued to appear weekly. They were eagerly read, widely circulated, and, indeed, impudently pirated, while they were still in the original form, and had a large sale when collected into volumes. *The Idler* may be described as a second part of *The Rambler,* somewhat livelier and somewhat weaker than the first part,

31. While Johnson was busied with his *Idlers,* his mother, who had accomplished her ninetieth year, died at Lichfield. It was long since he had seen her; but he had not failed to contribute largely, out of his small means, to her comfort. In order to defray the charges of her funeral, and to pay some debts which she had left, he wrote a little book in a single week, and sent off the sheets to the press without reading them over. A hundred pounds were paid him for the copyright; and the purchasers had great cause to be pleased with their bargain; for the book was *Rasselas.*

32. The success of *Rasselas* was great, though such ladies as Miss Lydia Languish must have been grievously disappointed when they found that the new volume from the circulating library was little more than a dissertation on the author's favorite theme, the Vanity of Human Wishes; that the Prince of Abyssinia was without a mistress, and the Princess without a lover; and that the story set the hero and the heroine down exactly where it had taken them up. The style was the subject of much eager controversy. The *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* took different sides. Many readers pronounced the writer a pompous pedant, who would never use a word of two syllables where it was possible to use a word of six, and who could not make a waiting woman relate her adventures without balancing every noun with another noun, and every epithet with another epithet. Another party, not less zealous, cited with delight numerous passages in which weighty meaning was expressed with accuracy and illustrated with splendor. And both the censure and the praise were merited.

33. About the plan of *Rasselas* little was said by the critics; and yet the faults of the plan might seem to invite severe criticism. Johnson has frequently blamed Shakespeare for neglecting the proprieties of time and

place, and for ascribing to one age or nation the manners and opinions of another. Yet Shakespeare has not sinned in this way more grievously than Johnson. Rasselas and Imlac, Nekayah and Pekuah, are evidently meant to be Abyssinians of the eighteenth century: for the Europe which Imlac describes is the Europe of the eighteenth century; and the inmates of the Happy Valley talk familiarly of that law of gravitation which Newton discovered, and which was not fully received even at Cambridge till the eighteenth century. What a real company of Abyssinians would have been may be learned from Bruce's *Travels*. But Johnson, not content with turning filthy savages, ignorant of their letters, and gorged with raw steaks cut from living cows, into philosophers as eloquent and enlightened as himself or his friend Burke, and into ladies as highly accomplished as Mrs. Lennox or Mrs. Sheridan, transferred the whole domestic system of England to Egypt. Into a land of harems, a land of polygamy, a land where women are married without ever being seen, he introduced the flirtations and jealousies of our ball-rooms. In a land where there is boundless liberty of divorce, wedlock is described as the indissoluble compact. "A youth and maiden meeting by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home, and dream of each other. Such," says Rasselas, "is the common process of marriage." Such it may have been, and may still be, in London, but assuredly not at Cairo. A writer who was guilty of such improprieties had little right to blame the poet who made Hector quote Aristotle, and represented Julio Romano as flourishing in the days of the oracle of Delphi.

34. By such exertions as have been described, Johnson supported himself till the year 1762. In that year a great change in his circumstances took place. He had from a

child been an enemy of the reigning dynasty. His Jacobite prejudices had been exhibited with little disguise both in his works and in his conversation. Even in his massy and elaborate *Dictionary,* he had, with a strange want of taste and judgment, inserted bitter and contumelious reflections on the Whig party. The excise, which was a favorite resource of Whig financiers, he had designated as a hateful tax. He had railed against the commissioners of excise in language so coarse that they had seriously thought of prosecuting him. He had with difficulty been prevented from holding up the Lord Privy Seal by name as an example of the meaning of the word "renegade." A pension he had defined as pay given to a state hireling to betray his country; a pensioner as a slave of state hired by a stipend to obey a master. It seemed unlikely that the author of these definitions would himself be pensioned. But that was a time of wonders. George the Third had ascended the throne; and had, in the course of a few months, disgusted many of the old friends and conciliated many of the old enemies of his house. The city was becoming mutinous. Oxford was becoming loyal. Cavendishes and Bentincks were murmuring. Somersets and Wyndhams were hastening to kiss hands. The head of the treasury was now Lord Bute, who was a Tory, and could have no objection to Johnson's Toryism. Bute wished to be thought a patron of men of letters; and Johnson was one of the most eminent and one of the most needy men of letters in Europe. A pension of three hundred a year was graciously offered, and with very little hesitation accepted.

35. This event produced a change in Johnson's whole way of life. For the first time since his boyhood he no longer felt the daily goad urging him to the daily toil. He was at liberty, after thirty years of anxiety and drudg-

ery, to indulge his constitutional indolence, to lie in bed till two in the afternoon, and to sit up talking till four in the morning, without fearing either the printer's devil or the sheriff's officer.

36. One laborious task indeed he had bound himself to perform. He had received large subscriptions for his promised edition of Shakespeare; he had lived on those subscriptions during some years; and he could not without disgrace omit to perform his part of the contract. His friends repeatedly exhorted him to make an effort; and he repeatedly resolved to do so. But, notwithstanding their exhortations and his resolutions, month followed month, year followed year, and nothing was done. He prayed fervently against his idleness; he determined, as often as he received the sacrament, that he would no longer doze away and trifle away his time; but the spell under which he lay resisted prayer and sacrament. His private notes at this time are made up of self-reproaches. "My indolence," he wrote on Easter eve in 1764, "has sunk into grosser sluggishness. A kind of strange oblivion has overspread me, so that I know not what has become of the last year." Easter 1765 came, and found him still in the same state. "My time," he wrote, "has been unprofitably spent, and seems as a dream that has left nothing behind. My memory grows confused, and I know not how the days pass over me." Happily for his honor, the charm which held him captive was at length broken by no gentle or friendly hand. He had been weak enough to pay serious attention to a story about a ghost which haunted a house in Cock Lane, and had actually gone himself with some of his friends, at one in the morning, to St. John's Church, Clerkenwell, in the hope of receiving a communication from the perturbed spirit. But the spirit, though adjured with all solemnity, remained ob-

stinately silent; and it soon appeared that a naughty girl of eleven had been amusing herself by making fools of so many philosophers. Churchill, who, confident in his powers, drunk with popularity, and burning with party spirit, was looking for some man of established fame and Tory politics to insult, celebrated the Cock Lane Ghost in three cantos, nicknamed Johnson Pomposo, asked where the book was which had been so long promised and so liberally paid for, and directly accused the great moralist of cheating. This terrible word proved effectual; and in October 1765 appeared, after a delay of nine years, the new edition of Shakespeare.

37. This publication saved Johnson's character for honesty, but added nothing to the fame of his abilities and learning. The preface, though it contains some good passages, is not in his best manner. The most valuable notes are those in which he had an opportunity of showing how attentively he had during many years observed human life and human nature. The best specimen is the note on the character of Polonius. Nothing so good is to be found even in Wilhelm Meister's admirable examination of Hamlet. But here praise must end. It would be difficult to name a more slovenly, a more worthless edition of any great classic. The reader may turn over play after play without finding one happy conjectural emendation, or one ingenious and satisfactory explanation of a passage which had baffled preceding commentators. Johnson had, in his prospectus, told the world that he was peculiarly fitted for the task which he had undertaken, because he had, as a lexicographer, been under the necessity of taking a wider view of the English language than any of his predecessors. That his knowledge of our literature was extensive is indisputable. But, unfortunately, he had altogether neglected that very part of our literature with which it is

especially desirable that an editor of Shakespeare should be conversant. It is dangerous to assert a negative. Yet little will be risked by the assertion, that in the two folio volumes of the English Dictionary there is not a single passage quoted from any dramatist of the Elizabethan age, except Shakespeare and Ben. Even from Ben the quotations are few. Johnson might easily, in a few months, have made himself well acquainted with every old play that was extant. But it never seems to have occurred to him that this was a necessary preparation for the work which he had undertaken. He would doubtless have admitted that it would be the height of absurdity in a man who was not familiar with the works of Æschylus and Euripides to publish an edition of Sophocles. Yet he ventured to publish an edition of Shakespeare, without having ever in his life, as far as can be discovered, read a single scene of Massinger, Ford, Decker, Webster, Marlowe, Beaumont, or Fletcher. His detractors were noisy and scurrilous. Those who most loved and honored him had little to say in praise of the manner in which he had discharged the duty of a commentator. He had, however, acquitted himself of a debt which had long lain heavy on his conscience; and he sank back into the repose from which the sting of satire had roused him. He long continued to live upon the fame which he had already won. He was honored by the University of Oxford with a Doctor's degree, by the Royal Academy with a professorship, and by the King with an interview, in which his Majesty most graciously expressed a hope that so excellent a writer would not cease to write. In the interval, however, between 1765 and 1775 Johnson published only two or three political tracts, the longest of which he could have produced in forty-eight hours, if he had worked as he worked on the *Life of Savage* and on *Rasselas*.

38. But, though his pen was now idle, his tongue was active. The influence exercised by his conversation, directly upon those with whom he lived, and indirectly on the whole literary world, was altogether without a parallel. His colloquial talents were indeed of the highest order. He had strong sense, quick discernment, wit, humor, immense knowledge of literature and of life, and an infinite store of curious anecdotes. As respected style, he spoke far better than he wrote. Every sentence which dropped from his lips was as correct in structure as the most nicely balanced period of the *Rambler*. But in his talk there were no pompous triads, and little more than a fair proportion of words in *osity* and *ation*. All was simplicity, ease, and vigor. He uttered his short, weighty, and pointed sentences with a power of voice, and a justness and energy of emphasis, of which the effect was rather increased than diminished by the rollings of his huge form, and by the asthmatic gaspings and puffings in which the peals of his eloquence generally ended. Nor did the laziness which made him unwilling to sit down to his desk prevent him from giving instruction or entertainment orally. To discuss questions of taste, of learning, of casuistry, in language so exact and so forcible that it might have been printed without the alteration of a word, was to him no exertion, but a pleasure. He loved, as he said, to fold his legs and have his talk out. He was ready to bestow the overflowings of his full mind on anybody who would start a subject, on a fellow-passenger in a stage coach, or on the person who sate at the same table with him in an eating-house. But his conversation was nowhere so brilliant and striking as when he was surrounded by a few friends, whose abilities and knowledge enabled them, as he once expressed it, to send him back every ball that he threw. Some of these, in 1764, formed themselves into

a club, which gradually became a formidable power in the commonwealth of letters. The verdicts pronounced by this conclave on new books were speedily known over all London, and were sufficient to sell off a whole edition in a day, or to condemn the sheets to the service of the trunk-maker and the pastry-cook. Nor shall we think this strange when we consider what great and various talents and acquirements met in the little fraternity. Goldsmith was the representative of poetry and light literature, Reynolds of the arts, Burke of political eloquence and political philosophy. There, too, were Gibbon, the greatest historian, and Jones, the greatest linguist, of the age. Garrick brought to the meetings his inexhaustible pleasantry, his incomparable mimicry, and his consummate knowledge of stage effect. Among the most constant attendants were two high-born and high-bred gentlemen, closely bound together by friendship, but of widely different characters and habits: Bennet Langton, distinguished by his skill in Greek literature, by the orthodoxy of his opinions, and by the sanctity of his life; and Topham Beauclerk, renowned for his amours, his knowledge of the gay world, his fastidious taste, and his sarcastic wit. To predominate over such a society was not easy. Yet even over such a society Johnson predominated. Burke might indeed have disputed the supremacy to which others were under the necessity of submitting. But Burke, though not generally a very patient listener, was content to take the second part when Johnson was present; and the club itself, consisting of so many eminent men, is to this day popularly designated as Johnson's Club.

39. Among the members of this celebrated body was one to whom it has owed the greater part of its celebrity, yet who was regarded with little respect by his brethren, and had not without difficulty obtained a seat among them.

This was James Boswell, a young Scotch lawyer, heir to an honorable name and a fair estate. That he was a coxcomb and a bore, weak, vain, pushing, curious, garrulous, was obvious to all who were acquainted with him. That he could not reason, that he had no wit, no humor, no eloquence, is apparent from his writings. And yet his writings are read beyond the Mississippi, and under the Southern Cross, and are likely to be read as long as the English exists, either as a living or as a dead language. Nature had made him a slave and an idolater. His mind resembled those creepers which the botanists call parasites, and which can subsist only by clinging round the stems and imbibing the juices of stronger plants. He must have fastened himself on somebody. He might have fastened himself on Wilkes, and have become the fiercest patriot in the Bill of Rights Society. He might have fastened himself on Whitefield, and have become the loudest field preacher among the Calvinistic Methodists. In a happy hour he fastened himself on Johnson. The pair might seem ill matched. For Johnson had early been prejudiced against Boswell's country. To a man of Johnson's strong understanding and irritable temper, the silly egotism and adulation of Boswell must have been as teasing as the constant buzz of a fly. Johnson hated to be questioned; and Boswell was eternally catechising him on all kinds of subjects, and sometimes propounded such questions as "What would you do, sir, if you were locked up in a tower with a baby?" Johnson was a water drinker; and Boswell was a wine-bibber, and indeed little better than a habitual sot. It was impossible that there should be perfect harmony between two such companions. Indeed, the great man was sometimes provoked into fits of passion in which he said things which the small man, during a few hours, seriously resented. Every quarrel, however, was soon made up.

During twenty years the disciple continued to worship the master: the master continued to scold the disciple, to sneer at him, and to love him. The two friends ordinarily resided at a great distance from each other. Boswell practised in the Parliament House of Edinburgh, and could pay only occasional visits to London. During those visits his chief business was to watch Johnson, to discover all Johnson's habits, to turn the conversation to subjects about which Johnson was likely to say something remarkable, and to fill quarto note books with minutes of what Johnson had said. In this way were gathered the materials out of which was afterwards constructed the most interesting biographical work in the world.

40. Soon after the club began to exist, Johnson formed a connection less important indeed to his fame, but much more important to his happiness, than his connection with Boswell. Henry Thrale, one of the most opulent brewers in the kingdom, a man of sound and cultivated understanding, rigid principles, and liberal spirit, was married to one of those clever, kind-hearted, engaging, vain, pert young women, who are perpetually doing or saying what is not exactly right, but who, do or say what they may, are always agreeable. In 1765 the Thrales became acquainted with Johnson, and the acquaintance ripened fast into friendship. They were astonished and delighted by the brilliancy of his conversation. They were flattered by finding that a man so widely celebrated, preferred their house to any other in London. Even the peculiarities which seemed to unfit him for civilized society, his gesticulations, his rollings, his puffings, his mutterings, the strange way in which he put on his clothes, the ravenous eagerness with which he devoured his dinner, his fits of melancholy, his fits of anger, his frequent rudeness, his occasional ferocity, increased the interest which his new

associates took in him. For these things were the cruel marks left behind by a life which had been one long conflict with disease and with adversity. In a vulgar hack writer such oddities would have excited only disgust. But in a man of genius, learning, and virtue their effect was to add pity to admiration and esteem. Johnson soon had an apartment at the brewery in Southwark, and a still more pleasant apartment at the villa of his friends on Streatham Common. A large part of every year he passed in those abodes, abodes which must have seemed magnificent and luxurious indeed, when compared with the dens in which he had generally been lodged. But his chief pleasures were derived from what the astronomer in his Abyssinian tale called "the endearing elegance of female friendship." Mrs. Thrale rallied him, soothed him, coaxed him, and, if she sometimes provoked him by her flippancy, made ample amends by listening to his reproofs with angelic sweetness of temper. When he was diseased in body and in mind, she was the most tender of nurses. No comfort that wealth could purchase, no contrivance that womanly ingenuity, set to work by womanly compassion, could devise, was wanting to his sick-room. He requited her kindness by an affection pure as the affection of a father, yet delicately tinged with a gallantry which, though awkward, must have been more flattering than the attentions of a crowd of the fools who gloried in the names, now obsolete, of Buck and Maccaroni. It should seem that a full half of Johnson's life, during about sixteen years, was passed under the roof of the Thrales. He accompanied the family sometimes to Bath, and sometimes to Brighton, once to Wales, and once to Paris. But he had at the same time a house in one of the narrow and gloomy courts on the north of Fleet Street. In the garrets was his library, a large and miscellaneous collection of books, fall-

ing to pieces and begrimed with dust. On a lower floor he sometimes, but very rarely, regaled a friend with a plain dinner, a veal pie, or a leg of lamb and spinach, and a rice pudding. Nor was the dwelling uninhabited during his long absences. It was the home of the most extraordinary assemblage of inmates that ever was brought together. At the head of the establishment Johnson had placed an old lady named Williams, whose chief recommendations were her blindness and her poverty. But, in spite of her murmurs and reproaches, he gave an asylum to another lady who was as poor as herself, Mrs. Desmoulins, whose family he had known many years before in Staffordshire. Room was found for the daughter of Mrs. Desmoulins, and for another destitute damsel, who was generally addressed as Miss Carmichael, but whom her generous host called Polly. An old quack doctor named Levett, who bled and dosed coal-heavers and hackney coachmen, and received for fees crusts of bread, bits of bacon, glasses of gin, and sometimes a little copper, completed this strange menagerie. All these poor creatures were at constant war with each other, and with Johnson's negro servant Frank. Sometimes, indeed, they transferred their hostilities from the servant to the master, complained that a better table was not kept for them, and railed or maundered till their benefactor was glad to make his escape to Streatham, or to the Mitre Tavern. And yet he, who was generally the haughtiest and most irritable of mankind, who was but too prompt to resent anything which looked like a slight on the part of a purse-proud bookseller, or of a noble and powerful patron, bore patiently from mendicants, who, but for his bounty, must have gone to the workhouse, insults more provoking than those for which he had knocked down Osborne and bidden defiance to Chesterfield. Year after

year Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Desmoulins, Polly, and Levett continued to torment him and to live upon him.

41. The course of life which has been described was interrupted in Johnson's sixty-fourth year by an important event. He had early read an account of the Hebrides, and had been much interested by learning that there was so near him a land peopled by a race which was still as rude and simple as in the Middle Ages. A wish to become intimately acquainted with a state of society so utterly unlike all that he had ever seen frequently crossed his mind. But it is not probable that his curiosity would have overcome his habitual sluggishness, and his love of the smoke, the mud, and the cries of London, had not Boswell importuned him to attempt the adventure, and offered to be his squire. At length, in August 1773, Johnson crossed the Highland line, and plunged courageously into what was then considered, by most Englishmen, as a dreary and perilous wilderness. After wandering about two months through the Celtic region, sometimes in rude boats which did not protect him from the rain, and sometimes on small shaggy ponies which could hardly bear his weight, he returned to his old haunts with a mind full of new images and new theories. During the following year he employed himself in recording his adventures. About the beginning of 1775, his *Journey to the Hebrides* was published, and was, during some weeks, the chief subject of conversation in all circles in which any attention was paid to literature. The book is still read with pleasure. The narrative is entertaining; the speculations, whether sound or unsound, are always ingenious; and the style, though too stiff and pompous, is somewhat easier and more graceful than that of his early writings. His prejudice against the Scotch had at length become little more than matter of jest; and whatever remained of the old feeling had been

effectually removed by the kind and respectful hospitality with which he had been received in every part of Scotland. It was, of course, not to be expected that an Oxonian Tory should praise the Presbyterian polity and ritual, or that an eye accustomed to the hedgerows and parks of England should not be struck by the bareness of Berwickshire and East Lothian. But even in censure Johnson's tone is not unfriendly. The most enlightened Scotchmen, with Lord Mansfield at their head, were well pleased. But some foolish and ignorant Scotchmen were moved to anger by a little unpalatable truth which was mingled with much eulogy, and assailed him whom they chose to consider as the enemy of their country, with libels much more dishonorable to their country than anything that he had ever said or written. They published paragraphs in the newspapers, articles in the magazines, sixpenny pamphlets, five-shilling books. One scribbler abused Johnson for being blear-eyed; another for being a pensioner; a third informed the world that one of the Doctor's uncles had been convicted of felony in Scotland, and had found that there was in that country one tree capable of supporting the weight of an Englishman. Macpherson, whose *Fingal* had been proved in the *Journey* to be an impudent forgery, threatened to take vengeance with a cane. The only effect of this threat was that Johnson reiterated the charge of forgery in the most contemptuous terms, and walked about, during some time, with a cudgel, which, if the impostor had not been too wise to encounter it, would assuredly have descended upon him, to borrow the sublime language of his own epic poem, "like a hammer on the red son of the furnace."

42. Of other assailants Johnson took no notice whatever. He had early resolved never to be drawn into controversy; and he adhered to his resolution with a stead-

fastness which is the more extraordinary, because he was, both intellectually and morally, of the stuff of which controversialists are made. In conversation, he was a singularly eager, acute, and pertinacious disputant. When at a loss for good reasons, he had recourse to sophistry; and, when heated by altercation, he made unsparing use of sarcasm and invective. But, when he took his pen in his hand, his whole character seemed to be changed. A hundred bad writers misrepresented him and reviled him; but not one of the hundred could boast of having been thought by him worthy of a refutation, or even of a retort. The Kenricks, Campbells, MacNicols, and Hendersons did their best to annoy him, in the hope that he would give them importance by answering them. But the reader will in vain search his works for any allusion to Kenrick or Campbell, to MacNicol or Henderson. One Scotchman, bent on vindicating the fame of Scotch learning, defied him to the combat in a detestable Latin hexameter.

"Maxime, si tu vis, cupio contendere tecum."

But Johnson took no notice of the challenge. He had learned, both from his own observation and from literary history, in which he was deeply read, that the place of books in the public estimation is fixed, not by what is written about them, but by what is written in them; and that an author whose works are likely to live is very unwise if he stoops to wrangle with detractors whose works are certain to die. He always maintained that fame was a shuttlecock which could be kept up only by being beaten back, as well as beaten forward, and which would soon fall if there were only one battledore. No saying was oftener in his mouth than that fine apothegm of Bentley, that no man was ever written down but by himself.

43. Unhappily, a few months after the appearance of the *Journey to the Hebrides,* Johnson did what none of his envious assailants could have done, and to a certain extent succeeded in writing himself down. The disputes between England and her American colonies had reached a point at which no amicable adjustment was possible. Civil war was evidently impending; and the ministers seem to have thought that the eloquence of Johnson might with advantage be employed to inflame the nation against the opposition here, and against the rebels beyond the Atlantic. He had already written two or three tracts in defense of the foreign and domestic policy of the government; and those tracts, though hardly worthy of him, were much superior to the crowd of pamphlets which lay on the counters of Almon and Stockdale. But his *Taxation no Tyranny* was a pitiable failure. The very title was a silly phrase, which can have been recommended to his choice by nothing but a jingling alliteration which he ought to have despised. The arguments were such as boys use in debating societies. The pleasantry was as awkward as the gambols of a hippopotamus. Even Boswell was forced to own that, in this unfortunate piece, he could detect no trace of his master's powers. The general opinion was that the strong faculties which had produced the *Dictionary* and the *Rambler* were beginning to feel the effect of time and of disease, and that the old man would best consult his credit by writing no more.

44. But this was a great mistake. Johnson had failed, not because his mind was less vigorous than when he wrote *Rasselas* in the evenings of a week, but because he had foolishly chosen, or suffered others to choose for him, a subject such as he would at no time have been competent to treat. He was in no sense a statesman. He never willingly read or thought or talked about affairs of state.

He loved biography, literary history, the history of manners; but political history was positively distasteful to him. The question at issue between the colonies and the mother country was a question about which he had really nothing to say. He failed, therefore, as the greatest men must fail when they attempt to do that for which they are unfit; as Burke would have failed if Burke had tried to write comedies like those of Sheridan; as Reynolds would have failed if Reynolds had tried to paint landscapes like those of Wilson. Happily, Johnson soon had an opportunity of proving most signally that his failure was not to be ascribed to intellectual decay.

45. On Easter eve 1777, some persons, deputed by a meeting which consisted of forty of the first booksellers in London, called upon him. Though he had some scruples about doing business at that season, he received his visitors with much civility. They came to inform him that a new edition of the English poets, from Cowley downwards, was in contemplation, and to ask him to furnish short biographical prefaces. He readily undertook the task, a task for which he was pre-eminently qualified. His knowledge of the literary history of England since the Restoration was unrivaled. That knowledge he had derived partly from books, and partly from sources which had long been closed; from old Grub Street traditions; from the talk of forgotten poetasters and pamphleteers who had long been lying in parish vaults; from the recollections of such men as Gilbert Walmesley, who had conversed with the wits of Button's; Cibber, who had mutilated the plays of two generations of dramatists; Orrery, who had been admitted to the society of Swift; and Savage, who had rendered services of no very honorable kind to Pope. The biographer therefore sate down to his task with a mind full of matter. He had at first intended

to give only a paragraph to every minor poet, and only four or five pages to the greatest name. But the flood of anecdote and criticism overflowed the narrow channel. The work, which was originally meant to consist only of a few sheets, swelled into ten volumes, small volumes, it is true, and not closely printed. The first four appeared in 1779, the remaining six in 1781.

46. The *Lives of the Poets* are, on the whole, the best of Johnson's works. The narratives are as entertaining as any novel. The remarks on life and on human nature are eminently shrewd and profound. The criticisms are often excellent, and, even when grossly and provoking unjust, well deserve to be studied. For, however erroneous they may be, they are never silly. They are the judgments of a mind trammeled by prejudice and deficient in sensibility, but vigorous and acute. They therefore generally contain a portion of valuable truth which deserves to be separated from the alloy; and, at the very worst, they mean something, a praise to which much of what is called criticism in our time has no pretensions.

47. Savage's *Life* Johnson reprinted nearly as it had appeared in 1744. Whoever, after reading that life, will turn to the other lives will be struck by the difference of style. Since Johnson had been at ease in his circumstances he had written little and had talked much. When, therefore, he, after the lapse of years, resumed his pen, the mannerism which he had contracted while he was in the constant habit of elaborate composition was less perceptible than formerly; and his diction frequently had a colloquial ease which it had formerly wanted. The improvement may be discerned by a skilful critic in the *Journey to the Hebrides,* and in the *Lives of the Poets* is so obvious that it cannot escape the notice of the most careless reader.

48. Among the lives the best are perhaps those of

Cowley, Dryden, and Pope. The very worst is, beyond all doubt, that of Gray.

49. This great work at once became popular. There was, indeed, much just and much unjust censure: but even those who were loudest in blame were attracted by the book in spite of themselves. Malone computed the gains of the publishers at five or six thousand pounds. But the writer was very poorly remunerated. Intending at first to write very short prefaces, he had stipulated for only two hundred guineas. The booksellers, when they saw how far his performance had surpassed his promise, added only another hundred. Indeed, Johnson, though he did not despise, or affect to despise, money, and though his strong sense and long experience ought to have qualified him to protect his own interests, seems to have been singularly unskilful and unlucky in his literary bargains. He was generally reputed the first English writer of his time. Yet several writers of his time sold their copyrights for sums such as he never ventured to ask. To give a single instance, Robertson received four thousand five hundred pounds for the *History of Charles V;* and it is no disrespect to the memory of Robertson to say that the *History of Charles V* is both a less valuable and a less amusing book than the *Lives of the Poets.*

50. Johnson was now in his seventy-second year. The infirmities of age were coming fast upon him. That inevitable event of which he never thought without horror was brought near to him; and his whole life was darkened by the shadow of death. He had often to pay the cruel price of longevity. Every year he lost what could never be replaced. The strange dependents to whom he had given shelter, and to whom, in spite of their faults, he was strongly attached by habit, dropped off one by one; and, in the silence of his home, he regretted even the

noise of their scolding matches. The kind and generous Thrale was no more; and it would have been well if his wife had been laid beside him. But she survived to be the laughing-stock of those who had envied her, and to draw from the eyes of the old man who had loved her beyond anything in the world tears far more bitter than he would have shed over her grave. With some estimable and many agreeable qualities, she was not made to be independent. The control of a mind more steadfast than her own was necessary to her respectability. While she was restrained by her husband, a man of sense and firmness, indulgent to her taste in trifles, but always the undisputed master of his house, her worst offences had been impertinent jokes, white lies, and short fits of pettishness ending in sunny good humor. But he was gone; and she was left an opulent widow of forty, with strong sensibility, volatile fancy, and slender judgment. She soon fell in love with a music-master from Brescia, in whom nobody but herself could discover anything to admire. Her pride, and perhaps some better feelings, struggled hard against this degrading passion. But the struggle irritated her nerves, soured her temper, and at length endangered her health. Conscious that her choice was one which Johnson could not approve, she became desirous to escape from his inspection. Her manner towards him changed. She was sometimes cold and sometimes petulant. She did not conceal her joy when he left Streatham; she never pressed him to return; and, if he came unbidden, she received him in a manner which convinced him he was no longer a welcome guest. He took the very intelligible hints which she gave. He read, for the last time, a chapter of the Greek Testament in the library which had been formed by himself. In a solemn and tender prayer he commended the house and its in-

mates to the Divine protection, and, with emotions which choked his voice and convulsed his powerful frame, left for ever that beloved home for the gloomy and desolate house behind Fleet Street, where the few and evil days which still remained to him were to run out. Here, in June 1783, he had a paralytic stroke, from which, however, he recovered, and which does not appear to have at all impaired his intellectual faculties. But other maladies came thick upon him. His asthma tormented him day and night. Dropsical symptoms made their appearance. While sinking under a complication of diseases, he heard that the woman whose friendship had been the chief happiness of sixteen years of his life had married an Italian fiddler; that all London was crying shame upon her; and that the newspapers and magazines were filled with allusions to the Ephesian matron, and the two pictures in *Hamlet*. He vehemently said that he would try to forget her existence. He never uttered her name. Every memorial of her which met his eye he flung into the fire. She meanwhile fled from the laughter and hisses of her countrymen and countrywomen to a land where she was unknown, hastened across Mount Cenis, and learned, while passing a merry Christmas of concerts and lemonade parties at Milan, that the great man with whose name hers is inseparably associated had ceased to exist.

51. He had, in spite of much mental and much bodily affliction, clung vehemently to life. The feeling described in that fine but gloomy paper which closes the series of his *Idlers* seemed to grow stronger in him as his last hour drew near. He fancied that he should be able to draw his breath more easily in a southern climate, and would probably have set out for Rome and Naples, but for his fear of the expense of the journey. That expense, indeed, he had the means of defraying; for he had laid up

about two thousand pounds, the fruit of labors which had made the fortune of several publishers. But he was unwilling to break in upon this hoard, and he seems to have wished even to keep its existence a secret. Some of his friends hoped that the government might be induced to increase his pension to six hundred pounds a year, but this hope was disappointed, and he resolved to stand one English winter more. That winter was his last. His legs grew weaker; his breath grew shorter; the fatal water gathered fast, in spite of incisions which he, courageous against pain, but timid against death, urged his surgeons to make deeper and deeper. Though the tender care which had mitigated his sufferings during months of sickness at Streatham was withdrawn, he was not left desolate. The ablest physicians and surgeons attended him, and refused to accept fees from him. Burke parted from him with deep emotion. Windham sate much in the sick-room, arranged the pillows, and sent his own servant to watch at night by the bed. Frances Burney, whom the old man had cherished with fatherly kindness, stood weeping at the door; while Langton, whose piety eminently qualified him to be an adviser and comforter at such a time, received the last pressure of his friend's hand within. When at length the moment, dreaded through so many years, came close, the dark cloud passed away from Johnson's mind. His temper became unusually patient and gentle; he ceased to think with terror of death, and of that which lies beyond death; and he spoke much of the mercy of God, and of the propitiation of Christ. In this serene frame of mind he died on the 13th of December 1784. He was laid, a week later, in Westminster Abbey, among the eminent men of whom he had been the historian,—Cowley and Denham, Dryden and Congreve, Gay, Prior, and Addison.

52. Since his death the popularity of his works—the *Lives of the Poets,* and, perhaps, the *Vanity of Human Wishes,* excepted—has greatly diminished. His *Dictionary* has been altered by editors till it can hardly be called his. An allusion to his *Rambler* or his *Idler* is not readily apprehended in literary circles. The fame even of *Rasselas* has grown somewhat dim. But, though the celebrity of the writings may have declined, the celebrity of the writer, strange to say, is as great as ever. Boswell's book has done for him more than the best of his own books could do. The memory of other authors is kept alive by their works. But the memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive. The old philosopher is still among us in the brown coat with the metal buttons and the shirt which ought to be at wash, blinking, puffing, rolling his head, drumming with his fingers, tearing his meat like a tiger, and swallowing his tea in oceans. No human being who has been more than seventy years in the grave is so well known to us. And it is but just to say that our intimate acquaintance with what he would himself have called the anfractuosities of his intellect and of his temper serves only to strengthen our conviction that he was both a great and a good man.

SELECTIONS FROM JOHNSON

LETTER TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD

February 7, 1755.

My Lord:

I have lately been informed by the proprietor of the *World,* that two papers, in which my *Dictionary* is recommended to the public, were written by your Lordship. To be so distinguished is an honor which, being very little accustomed to favors from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address; and I could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself "Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre"; that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged, that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

Seven years, my Lord, have now passed, since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or

one smile of favor. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a Patron before.

The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.

Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labors, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the Public should consider me as owing that to a Patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favorer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less; for I have been long wakened from that dream of hope, in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most humble,

Most obedient servant,

SAM. JOHNSON.

The Rambler, No. 60

Saturday, October 13, 1750

—Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
Planius et melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.
—Hor. *Ep.* 1. 2. 4.

Whose works the beautiful and base contain,
Of vice and virtue more instructive rules
Than all the sober sages of the schools.—Francis.

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination that realizes the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.

Our passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasure proposed to our minds, by recognizing them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life. It is not easy for the most artful writer to give us an interest in happiness or misery which we think ourselves never likely to feel, and with which we have never yet been made acquainted. Histories of the downfall of kingdoms, and revolutions of empires, are read with great tranquillity; the imperial tragedy pleases common auditors only by its pomp of ornament, and grandeur of ideas; and the man whose faculties have been engrossed by business, and whose heart never fluttered but at the rise or fall of the stocks, won-

ders how the attention can be seized, or the affection agitated, by a tale of love.

Those parallel circumstances and kindred images to which we readily conform our minds are, above all other writings, to be found in narratives of the lives of particular persons; and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.

The general and rapid narratives of history, which involve a thousand fortunes in the business of a day, and complicate innumerable incidents in one great transaction, afford few lessons applicable to private life, which derives its comforts and its wretchedness from the right or wrong management of things, which nothing but their frequency makes considerable—"Parva si non fiant quotidie," says Pliny—and which can have no place in those relations which never descend below the consultation of senates, the motions of armies, and the schemes of conspirators.

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. For, not only every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use; but there is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to human kind. A great part of the time of those who are placed at the greatest distance by fortune, or by temper, must unavoidably pass in the same manner; and though, when the claims of nature are satisfied, caprice, and vanity,

and accident, begin to produce discriminations and peculiarities, yet the eye is not very heedful or quick which cannot discover the same causes still terminating their influence in the same effects, though sometimes accelerated, sometimes retarded, or perplexed by multiplied combinations. We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure.

It is frequently objected to relations of particular lives, that they are not distinguished by any striking or wonderful vicissitudes. The scholar who passed his life among his books, the merchant who conducted only his own affairs, the priest whose sphere of action was not extended beyond that of his duty, are considered as no proper objects of public regard, however they might have excelled in their several stations, whatever might have been their learning, integrity, and piety. But this notion arises from false measures of excellence and dignity, and must be eradicated by considering that, in the esteem of uncorrupted reason, what is of most use is of most value.

It is, indeed, not improper to take honest advantages of prejudice, and to gain attention by a celebrated name; but the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue. The account of Thuanus is, with great propriety, said by its author to have been written that it might lay open to posterity the private and familiar character of that man, "cujus ingenium et candorem ex ipsius scriptis sunt olim semper

mirraturi"—"whose candor and genius will to the end of time be by his writings preserved in admiration."

There are many invisible circumstances which, whether we read as inquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science, or increase our virtue, are more important than public occurrences. Thus Sallust, the great master of nature, has not forgot, in his account of Catiline, to remark that "his walk was now quick, and again slow," as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion. Thus the story of Melanchthon affords a striking lecture on the value of time, by informing us that, when he made an appointment, he expected not only the hour, but the minute to be fixed, that the day might not run out in the idleness of suspense; and all the plans and enterprises of De Witt are now of less importance to the world, than that part of his personal character which represents him as "careful of his health, and negligent of his life."

But biography has often been allotted to writers who seem very little acquainted with the nature of their task, or very negligent about the performance. They rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions of preferments; and so little regard the manners or behavior of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral.

If now and then they condescend to inform the world of particular facts, they are not always so happy as to select the most important. I know not well what ad-

vantage posterity can receive from the only circumstance by which Tickell has distinguished Addison from the rest of mankind, "the irregularity of his pulse"; nor can I think myself overpaid for the time spent in reading the life of Malherb by being enabled to relate after the learned biographer, that Malherb had two predominant opinions: one, that the looseness of a single woman might destroy all her boast of ancient descent; the other, that the French beggars made use very improperly and barbarously of the phrase "noble gentleman," because either word included the sense of both.

There are, indeed, some natural reasons why these narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much instruction or delight, and why most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless. If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence; for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original.

If the biographer writes from personal knowledge, and makes haste to gratify the public curiosity, there is danger lest his interest, his fear, his gratitude, or his tenderness, overpower his fidelity, and tempt him to conceal, if not to invent. There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with

uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsic and casual circumstances. "Let me remember," says Hale, "when I find myself inclined to pity a criminal, that there is likewise a pity due to the country." If we owe regard to the memory of the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.

The Idler, No. 85

Saturday, December 1, 1759

One of the peculiarities which distinguish the present age is the multiplication of books. Every day brings new advertisements of literary undertakings, and we are flattered with repeated promises of growing wise on easier terms than our progenitors.

How much either happiness or knowledge is advanced by this multitude of authors, it is not very easy to decide. He that teaches us anything which we knew not before, is undoubtedly to be reverenced as a master.

He that conveys knowledge by more pleasing ways, may very properly be loved as a benefactor; and he that supplies life with innocent amusement, will be certainly caressed as a pleasing companion.

But few of those who fill the world with books, have any pretensions to the hope either of pleasing or instructing. They have often no other task than to lay two books before them, out of which they compile a third, without any new materials of their own, and with very little application of judgment to those which former authors have supplied.

That all compilations are useless, I do not assert,

Particles of science are often very widely scattered. Writers of extensive comprehension have incidental remarks upon topics very remote from the principal subject, which are often more valuable than formal treatises, and which yet are not known because they are not promised in the title. He that collects those under proper heads is very laudably employed; for though he exerts no great abilities in the work, he facilitates the progress of others, and, by making that easy of attainment which is already written, may give some mind, more vigorous or more adventurous than his own, leisure for new thoughts and original designs.

But the collections poured lately from the press have been seldom made at any great expense of time or inquiry, and therefore only serve to distract choice without supplying any real want.

It is observed that *a corrupt society has many laws;* I know not whether it is not equally true, that *an ignorant age has many books.* When the treasures of ancient knowledge lie unexamined, and original authors are neglected and forgotten, compilers and plagiaries are encouraged, who give us again what we had before, and grow great by setting before us what our own sloth had hidden from our view.

Yet are not even these writers to be indiscriminately censured and rejected. Truth, like beauty, varies in its fashions, and is best recommended by different dresses to different minds; and he that recalls the attention of mankind to any part of learning which time has left behind it, may be truly said to advance the literature of his own age. As the manners of nations vary, new topics of persuasion become necessary, and new combinations of imagery are produced; and he that can accommodate himself to the reigning taste, may always have

readers who perhaps would not have looked upon better performances.

To exact of every man that writes that he should say something new, would be to reduce authors to a small number; to oblige the most fertile genius to say only what is new, would be to contract his volumes to a few pages. Yet, surely, there ought to be some bounds to repetition; libraries ought no more to be heaped forever with the same thoughts differently expressed, than with the same books differently decorated.

The good or evil which these secondary writers produce is seldom of any long duration. As they owe their existence to change of fashion, they commonly disappear when a new fashion becomes prevalent. The authors that in any nation last from age to age are very few, because there are very few that have any other claim to notice than that they catch hold on present curiosity, and gratify some accidental desire, or produce some temporary conveniency.

But however the writers of the day may despair of future fame, they ought at least to forbear any present mischief. Though they cannot arrive at eminent heights of excellence, they might keep themselves harmless. They might take care to inform themselves before they attempt to inform others, and exert the little influence which they have for honest purposes.

But such is the present state of our literature, that the ancient sage, who thought *a great book a great evil,* would now think the multitude of books a multitude of evils. He would consider a bulky writer who engrossed a year, and a swarm of pamphleteers who stole each an hour, as equal wasters of human life, and would make no other difference between them, than between the beast of prey and a flight of locusts.

The Idler, No. 103

Saturday, April 5, 1760

Respicere ad longæ jussit spatia ultima vitæ.—Juv.

Much of the pain and pleasure of mankind arises from the conjectures which every one makes of the thoughts of others; we all enjoy praise which we do not hear, and resent contempt which we do not see. The Idler may therefore be forgiven, if he suffers his imagination to represent to him what his readers will say or think, when they are informed that they have now his last paper in their hands.

Value is more frequently raised by scarcity than by use. That which lay neglected when it was common, rises in estimation as its quantity becomes less. We seldom learn the true want of what we have, till it is discovered that we can have no more.

This essay will, perhaps, be read with care even by those who have not yet attended to any other; and he that finds this late attention recompensed, will not forbear to wish that he had bestowed it sooner.

Though the Idler and his readers have contracted no close friendship, they are perhaps both unwilling to part. There are few things not purely evil, of which we can say, without some emotion of uneasiness, *this is the last.* Those who never could agree together, shed tears when mutual discontent has determined them to final separation; of a place which has been frequently visited, though without pleasure, the last look is taken with heaviness of heart; and the Idler, with all his chillness of tranquillity, is not wholly unaffected by the thought that his last essay is now before him.

The secret horror of the last is inseparable from a thinking being, whose life is limited, and to whom death is dreadful. We always make a secret comparison between a part and the whole; the termination of any period of life reminds us that life itself has likewise its termination; when we have done any thing for the last time, we involuntarily reflect that a part of the days allotted to us is past, and that as more is past there is less remaining.

It is very happily and kindly provided, that in every life there are certain pauses and interruptions, which force consideration upon the careless, and seriousness upon the light; points of time where one course of action ends, and another begins; and by vicissitudes of fortune, or alteration of employment, by change of place or loss of friendship, we are forced to say of something, *this is the last.*

An even and unvaried tenor of life always hides from our apprehension the approach of its end. Succession is not perceived but by variation; he that lives to-day as he lived yesterday, and expects that as the present day is such will be the morrow, easily conceives time as running in a circle and returning to itself. The uncertainty of our duration is impressed commonly by dissimilitude of condition; it is only by finding life changeable that we are reminded of its shortness.

This conviction, however forcible at every new impression, is every moment fading from the mind; and partly by the inevitable incursion of new images, and partly by voluntary exclusion of unwelcome thoughts, we are again exposed to the universal fallacy; and we must do another thing for the last time, before we consider that the time is nigh when we shall do no more.

As the last Idler is published in that solemn week

which the Christian world has always set apart for the examination of the conscience, the review of life, the extinction of earthly desires, and the renovation of holy purposes; I hope that my readers are already disposed to view every incident with seriousness, and improve it by meditation; and that, when they see this series of trifles brought to a conclusion, they will consider that by outliving the Idler, they have passed weeks, months, and years, which are now no longer in their power; that an end must in time be put to everything great as to everything little; that to life must come its last hour, and to this system of being its last day, the hour at which probation ceases, and repentance will be vain; the day in which every work of the hand, and imagination of the heart, shall be brought to judgment, and an everlasting futurity shall be determined by the past.

THE HISTORY OF RASSELAS, PRINCE OF ABYSSINIA

Chapter I

(Description of a Palace in a Valley)

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.

Rasselas was the fourth son of the mighty emperor, in whose dominions the Father of Waters begins his course: whose bounty pours down the streams of plenty, and scatters over half the world the harvests of Egypt.

According to the custom which has descended from age to age among the monarchs of the torrid zone, Rasselas was confined in a private palace, with the other sons and daughters of Abyssinian royalty, till the order of succession should call him to the throne.

The place which the wisdom or policy of antiquity had destined for the residence of the Abyssinian princes, was a spacious valley in the kingdom of Amhara, surrounded on every side by mountains, of which the summits overhang the middle part. The only passage, by which it could be entered, was a cavern that passed under a rock, of which it has been long disputed whether it was the work of nature or of human industry. The outlet of the cavern was concealed by thick wood, and the mouth which opened into the valley was closed with gates of iron, forged by the artificers of ancient days, so massy that no man could without the help of engines open or shut them.

From the mountains on every side, rivulets descended that filled all the valley with verdure and fertility, and formed a lake in the middle inhabited by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature has taught to dip the wing in water. This lake discharged its superfluities by a stream which entered a dark cleft of the mountain on the northern side, and fell with dreadful noise from precipice to precipice till it was heard no more.

The sides of the mountains were covered with trees, the banks of the brooks were diversified with flowers; every blast shook spices from the rocks, and every month dropped fruits upon the ground. All animals that bite the grass, or browse the shrub, whether wild or tame, wandered in this extensive circuit, secured from beasts of prey by the mountains which confined them. On one

part were flocks and herds feeding in the pastures, on another all the beasts of chase frisking in the lawns; the sprightly kid was bounding on the rocks, the subtle monkey frolicking in the trees, and the solemn elephant reposing in the shade. All the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded.

The valley wide and fruitful, supplied its inhabitants with the necessaries of life; and all delights and superfluities were added at the annual visit which the emperor paid his children, when the iron gate was opened to the sound of music; and during eight days every one that resided in the valley was required to propose whatever might contribute to make seclusion pleasant, to fill up vacancies of attention, and lessen the tediousness of time. Every desire was immediately granted. All the artificers of pleasure were called to gladden the festivity; the musicians exerted the power of harmony, and the dancers showed their activity before the princes, in hope that they should pass their lives in this blissful captivity, to which those only were admitted whose performance was thought able to add novelty to luxury. Such was the appearance of security and delight which this retirement afforded, that they, to whom it was new, always desired that it might be perpetual; and as those, on whom the iron gate had once closed, were never suffered to return, the effect of long experience could not be known. Thus every year produced new schemes of delight, and new competitors for imprisonment.

The palace stood on an eminence raised about thirty paces above the surface of the lake. It was divided into many squares or courts, built with greater or less magnificence, according to the rank of those for whom they were designed. The roofs were turned into arches of

mossy stone, joined by a cement that grew harder by time, and the building stood from century to century deriding the solstitial rains and equinoctial hurricanes, without need of reparation.

This house, which was so large as to be fully known to none but some ancient officers who successively inherited the secrets of the place, was built as if suspicion herself had dictated the plan. To every room there was an open and secret passage, every square had a communication with the rest, either from the upper stories by private galleries, or by the subterranean passages from the lower apartments. Many of the columns had unsuspected cavities, in which a long race of monarchs had deposited their treasures. They then closed up the opening with marble, which was never to be removed but in the utmost exigencies of the kingdom; and concealed their accumulations in a book which was itself concealed in a tower not entered but by the emperor, attended by the prince who stood next in succession.

Chapters II-IX

(Summary)

Rasselas gradually becomes dissatisfied with life in this happy valley, feeling that "man surely has some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense, which must be satisfied before he can be happy." It is presently suggested to Rasselas that if he could see the miseries of the world, he would know how to value his present state. This suggestion he accepts, and looks about him to discover how he may escape from the happy valley. Escape

by flying proves decidedly unpractical. While meditating a more favorable method of release, Rasselas hears a poem, by a certain sage named Imlac, on the various conditions of humanity. Finding in Imlac one who well knew the world, Rasselas persuades the sage to narrate the story of his life. As a philosophical observer of many countries Imlac has much to say. One portion of his reflections is the chapter on poetry (Chapter X).

Chapter X

(Imlac's History Continued. A Dissertation upon Poetry)

"Wherever I went, I found that poetry was considered as the highest learning, and regarded with a veneration somewhat aproaching to that which man would pay to the Angelic Nature. And yet it fills me with wonder, that, in almost all countries, the most ancient poets are considered as the best: whether it be that every other kind of knowledge is an acquisition gradually attained, and poetry is a gift conferred at once; or that the first poetry of every nation surprised them as a novelty, and retained the credit by consent which it received by accident at first; or whether, as the province of poetry is to describe nature and passion, which are always the same, the first writers took possession of the most striking objects for description and the most probable occurrences for fiction, and left nothing to those that followed them, but transcription of the same events, and new combinations of the same images. Whatever be the reason, it is commonly observed that the early writers are in possession of nature, and their followers of art: that the first excel in strength and invention, and the latter in elegance and refinement.

"I was desirous to add my name to this illustrious fraternity. I read all the poets of Persia and Arabia, and was able to repeat by memory the volumes that are suspended in the mosque of Mecca. But I soon found that no man was ever great by imitation. My desire of excellence impelled me to transfer my attention to nature and to life. Nature was to be my subject, and men to be my auditors: I could never describe what I had not seen: I could not hope to move those with delight or terror, whose interests and opinions I did not understand.

"Being now resolved to be a poet, I saw every thing with a new purpose; my sphere of attention was suddenly magnified: no kind of knowledge was to be overlooked. I ranged mountains and deserts for images and resemblances, and pictured upon my mind every tree of the forest and flower of the valley. I observed with equal care the crags of the rock and the pinnacles of the palace. Sometimes I wandered along the mazes of the rivulet, and sometimes watched the changes of the summer clouds. To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination: he must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little. The plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, and meteors of the sky, must all concur to store his mind with inexhaustible variety: for every idea is useful for the enforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth; and he, who knows most, will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his reader with remote allusions and unexpected instruction.

"All the appearances of nature I was therefore careful to study, and every country which I have surveyed, has contributed something to my poetical powers."

"In so wide a survey," said the prince, "you must

surely have left much unobserved. I have lived till now, within the circuit of these mountains, and yet cannot walk abroad without the sight of something which I had never beheld before, or never heeded."

"The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

"But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions, and accidental influences, of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same: he must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name; contemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place.

"His labor is not yet at an end: he must know many languages and many sciences; and, that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must, by incessant practice, familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony."

Prayers

(*On Undertaking the Rambler*)

Almighty God, the giver of all good things, without whose help all labor is ineffectual, and without whose grace all wisdom is folly; grant, I beseech Thee, that in this undertaking thy Holy Spirit may not be withheld from me, but that I may promote thy glory, and the salvation of myself and others: grant this, O Lord, for the sake of thy son Jesus Christ. Amen.

(*On the Day on Which My Dear Mother Was Buried, Jan. 23, 1759*)

Almighty God, merciful Father, in whose hands are life and death, sanctify unto me the sorrow which I now feel. Forgive me whatever I have done unkindly to my mother, and whatever I have omitted to do kindly. Make me to remember her good precepts and good example, and to reform my life according to thy holy word, that I may lose no more opportunities of good. I am sorrowful, O Lord; let not my sorrow be without fruit. Let it be followed by holy resolutions, and lasting amendment, that when I shall die like my mother, I may be received to everlasting life.

I commend, O Lord, so far as it may be lawful, into thy hands, the soul of my departed mother, beseeching

Thee to grant her whatever is most beneficial to her in her present state.

O Lord, grant me thy Holy Spirit, and have mercy upon me for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

(*On Taking Leave of the Thrale Household*)

Almighty God, Father of all mercy, help me by thy grace, that I may, with humble and sincere thankfulness, remember the comforts and conveniences which I have enjoyed at this place; and that I may resign them with holy submission, equally trusting in thy protection when thou givest, and when thou takest away. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, have mercy upon me.

To thy fatherly protection, O Lord, I commend this family. Bless, guide, and defend them, that they may so pass through this world, as finally to enjoy in thy presence everlasting happiness, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen.

(*On Receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, on Sunday, December 5, 1784*)

Almighty and most merciful Father, I am now, as to human eyes it seems, about to commemorate, for the last time, the death of thy Son Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits, and thy mercy; enforce and accept my imperfect repentance; make this commemoration available to the confirmation of my faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity; and make the death of thy Son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption. Have mercy upon me, and pardon the

multitude of my offenses. Bless my friends; have mercy upon all men. Support me, by the grace of thy Holy Spirit, in the days of weakness, and at the hour of death; and receive me, at my death, to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

NOTES AND COMMENT

NOTES AND COMMENT

Heavy numerals refer to page; light ones to line.

Throughout these Notes references to Boswell's *Life of Johnson* are to the edition by George Birkbeck Hill.

3, 2-3. **Michael Johnson.** If Murphy's characterization of Michael Johnson is correct, the father and the son were in many respects alike: "a man of large athletic make, and violent passions; wrongheaded, positive, and at time afflicted with a degree of melancholy, little short of madness." (*Johnsonian Miscellanies,* I, 358-9. See also Hill's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 35.)

3, 4. **Lichfield:** a small city about 115 miles northwest of London. It has a fine cathedral and many memorials of Johnson. Johnson declared to Boswell (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* II, 463) that the inhabitants of Lichfield were "the most sober, decent people in England, the genteelest in proportion to their wealth, and spoke the purest English."

3, 5. **Midland counties.** Consult a map of England.

3, 8-9. **Staffordshire and Worcestershire.** Lichfield is in Staffordshire; Worcestershire is the adjoining county on the south.

3, 10-14. **Between him,** etc. Observe that the two points made here are slightly elaborated in the next sentence.

3, 12. **Churchman.** To enjoy English literature, one ought to know something about the organization and terminology of the Church of England. On these matters one may consult Hugh Elliott's *The Church and the State,* in the "English Citizen Series"; or Mackower's *Constitutional History of the Church of England.*

3, 12-13. **Qualified himself for municipal office.** A good deal of English history is concealed behind this brief clause. Look up "Test Act" and "Occasional Conformity" in a history of England.

3, 13-14. **Sovereigns in possession.** By the Revolution of 1688 James II was forced to yield to William and Mary

(1689-1702) and to Anne (1702-1714). The Jacobites (the Latin *Jacobus* = *James*) were those who disbelieved in the Revolution of 1688 and remained loyal to James II and his descendants. Look up the details of the period in any general history of England.

4, 11. **Royal touch.** The disease of the skin now called scrofula was in Johnson's day still known as "the king's evil," and was believed to be curable by the royal touch.

4, 29-30. **Read what was interesting.** See Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, I, 428: "I would not advise a rigid adherence to a particular plan of study. I myself have never persisted in any plan for two days together. A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good. A young man should read five hours in a day, and so may acquire a great deal of knowledge." Macaulay and Johnson were not unlike on this point. What are the disadvantages of such reading as is here advised? Do they appear in Macaulay's work? In Johnson's?

5, 1. **The masters of Attic poetry and eloquence.** Who are these masters and what did they write? Begin by looking up "Attic" in the dictionary. Then consult the best available books of reference upon the history of Greek literature. This will lead you to the names of the writers you seek and the subjects of their tragedies and orations.

5, 5. **That Augustan delicacy of taste,** etc. Here again Macaulay and Johnson were alike. Macaulay, so his biographer tells us, particularly objected to that most delicate and persistent drill in Latin verse composition which in the English public schools and universities used to be one of the chief tests of polished scholarship.

5, 9. **Sixth form at Eton.** Of the English public schools one of the most famous is Eton, at Windsor, near London. The "sixth form" is the senior class. Two excellent stories of English public school life are *Tom Brown at Rugby* by Thomas Hughes, and *The Hill* by H. A. Vachell. The latter is a story of Harrow.

5, 10. **Restorers of learning.** Look up "Renaissance" (or "Renascence") in the encyclopedia.

5, 12. **Petrarch:** Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), an Italian humanist of the fourteenth century, famous for his scholarship and for his writings in both Latin and Italian. From

Robinson and Rolfe's edition of Petrarch's letters one can get, in English, an excellent idea of the spirit of the great "restorers of learning."

5, 18. **While he was thus irregularly educating himself,** etc. Compare Macaulay's own life at the time of his father's failure. The circumstances are similar.

5, 24-25. **Either university.** In Johnson's time Oxford and Cambridge, both ancient even then, were the only universities in England.

5, 27. **Pembroke College.** The universities of Oxford and Cambridge are each made up of a score or more of separate colleges, each with its chapel, dining-hall, library, master, tutors, etc. Pembroke College, founded in 1624, preserves several memorials of Johnson, among them the desk upon which he wrote the *Dictionary*.

5, 34. **Macrobius.** Look him up in a classical dictionary so that you can get the connection with the sentences on page 5, lines 2 ff.

6, 2. **Equal attainments.** Johnson had spent the two years before college in reading, "not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all manly: though but little Greek, only some Anacreon and Hesiod; but in this irregular manner (added he) I had looked into a great many books, which were not commonly known at the university, where they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors; so that when I came to Oxford, Dr. Adams, now master of Pembroke College, told me I was the best qualified for the university that he had ever known come there." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 57.)

6, 3-4. **About three years.** Dr. George Birkbeck Hill (*Dr. Johnson: His Friends and His Critics,* Appendix) has shown that Johnson remained at Oxford "barely fourteen months."

6, 7. **Christ Church . . . that aristocratical society.** Christ Church was, and is, one of the most aristocratic of Oxford colleges.

6, 9. **Shoes . . . a new pair.** Carlyle has something to say about this in his chapter on "The Hero as Man of Letters" in *Heroes and Hero-Worship.*

6, 12. **Gentleman commoner.** Readers of *Tom Brown at Oxford* will remember Hardy, the pensioner, who, partly through Tom's efforts, won his way into the respect of his college by

proving to be such an admirable oarsman, scholar, and gentleman. The reason that Hardy's lot was so hard was that natural, democratic relations in the college were at that time rendered impossible by the gentleman-commoners, who patronized nearly all whom they did not ignore.

6, 14. **Gross disrespect.** To say that Johnson's conduct was the height of disrespect and that "in every mutiny" he was a leader is to distort the evidence. Here, as often, Macaulay seems to find the mere facts not striking enough. The student should be constantly on his guard against this fault, and should allow for it exactly as he would if he knew his watch to be in the habit of gaining a little time each day.

6, 14-15. **Generally to be seen,** etc.: exaggerated from Boswell's report (I, 74) furnished by the Bishop of Dromore: "I have heard from some of his contemporaries that he was generally seen lounging at the college gate, with a circle of young students round him, whom he was entertaining with wit, and keeping from their studies, if not spiriting them up to rebellion against the college discipline, which in his mature years he so much extolled."

6, 16. **Effigy.** What is the derivation of this word? What does it mean here? Has it ever another meaning?

6, 25. **Read with pleasure by Pope himself.** Pope is said to have returned the poem to Arbuthnot with the remark: "The writer of this poem will leave it a question for posterity whether his or mine be the original."—*Johnsonian Miscellanies,* I, 370, note 5.

6, 32. **In the autumn of 1731.** Although Johnson's name remained on the college books until the autumn of 1731, he seems not to have been in continuous residence after December, 1729.

7, 7. **Aggravation.** Note the precise application of a word which is frequently used inaccurately.

7, 18 ff. **Would.** A report that Johnson once did a thing is to Macaulay sufficient ground for representing it as habitual.

8, 20. **Hervey.** See page 11, lines 24 ff.

8, 22. **Gilbert Walmesley.** See page 42, line 28, and the note thereon.

8, 29. **Usher:** "an under-teacher; one who introduces young scholars to higher learning."—Johnson's *Dictionary.*

8, 33-34. **Birmingham . . . literary drudgery.** Birming-

ham, now a great manufacturing city, is not far from Lichfield. Johnson's work there was hack writing for a Mr. Warren, a bookseller and the publisher of the *Birmingham Journal.*

9, 2. **A Latin book about Abyssinia.** "Having mentioned that he had read at Pembroke College a Voyage to Abyssinia, by Lobo, a Portuguese Jesuit, and that he thought an abridgment and translation of it from the French into English might be an useful and profitable publication" (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 86), Johnson was at length prevailed upon to finish the work, which was published in 1735. Note that Johnson's translation was made from a French version of the original.

9, 3. **Publishing by subscription:** pledging in advance purchases enough to pay for issuing the book. This was common at the time. Early editions of eighteenth-century books often contain a printed list of the subscribers.

9, 3. **Politian:** a Florentine humanist and poet of the fifteenth century, who wrote in both Italian and Latin. Johnson spoke of modern writers of Latin poetry as a class of authors who, even in his day, were too much neglected.

9, 8. **Fell in love.** Rarely are Macaulay's boisterous rhetoric and untamable habit of exaggeration more displeasing than in his comments upon Johnson's wife. These two paragraphs contain many errors. But even if Macaulay had been right about the age of Mrs. Johnson's children, about Johnson's pet name for his wife, and about her poverty, which he was not, nothing could have justified the vulgar phrase "tawdry painted grandmother." Carlyle, whose treatment of the matter shows insight and sympathy, remarks that "Johnson's deathless affection for his Tetty was always venerable and noble." Note that Lucy Porter was six years younger than Johnson (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* II, 462); that Mrs. Johnson's property apparently amounted to some $4,000 (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 95n.); that Johnson's nickname for her was "Tetty" or "Tetsy."

9, 13-14. **Queensberrys and Lepels:** noble families prominent in the world of fashion.

9, 16. **Had seldom or never.** In view of Boswell's testimony that Johnson had in his early years passed much time in the company of ladies remarkable for good breeding, this statement of Macaulay must be rejected.

10, 7. **Garrick.** See Macaulay's third paragraph on page

19. David Garrick (1717-1779) and his brother were Johnson's first pupils. In 1737, Johnson and Garrick, both very poor, went up to London together to try their fortunes in the great city. Garrick became the most famous actor of his time. Compare the notes on 11, 32-33; 20, 17; and 42, 22-23.

11, 4. **Thomson:** James Thomson (1700-1748). His *Seasons* (1726-1730), describing the various scenes and occupations of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, is now little read. But in its own time it gave much pleasure to those who were beginning to be fond of rural life and landscape in poetry. During the period immediately before Thomson, poetry had usually dealt with London rather than with the country.

11, 6-7. **Pasquin . . . The Beggar's Opera.** *Pasquin: a Dramatick Satire on the Times* (1736) by Henry Fielding (1707-1754), had a run of sixty nights. Of the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* (first performed in 1728) by John Gay (1685-1732) the writer (probably Pope himself) of a note on Pope's *Dunciad,* III, 330, observes that "it was acted in London sixty-three days, uninterrupted; and renewed the next season with equal applause. It spread into all the great towns of England, was played in many places to the thirtieth and fortieth time, at Bath and Bristol, fifty, etc. It made its progress into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, where it was performed twenty-four days together."

11, 16. **Porter's knot:** a pad by which the porter eased the burden of his load.

11, 32-33. **Drury Lane:** a small street in the midst of London. Its reputation for respectability was none too good. In 1747, when Garrick became joint owner of the Drury Lane Theatre, Johnson wrote a famous prologue for the opening.

12, 8-9. **The sight of food,** etc. This description is much overdrawn.

12, 11. **Ordinaries:** restaurants.

12, 25-29. **Osborne . . . Harleian Library.** The Library of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, was bought by a bookseller named Osborne, who engaged Johnson to help make a catalogue and prospectus of it. Johnson told Boswell (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 154) the "simple truth" of the matter as follows: "Sir, he was impertinent to me, and I beat him. But it was not in his shop: it was in my own chamber."

12, 32. **Cave.** Edward Cave (1691-1754) is chiefly remem-

bered as the founder of the *Gentleman's Magazine.* He was also proprietor of the *Rambler.* Johnson had a generous regard for Cave but admitted that he was "a penurious paymaster."

13, 9 ff. **Blefuscu, Mildendo,** etc. These words should be looked up in Swift's *Gulliver.*

13, 19. **One form of government,** etc. Sir Adam Ferguson suggested to Dr. Johnson (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* II, 170) "that luxury corrupts a people, and destroys the spirit of liberty. JOHNSON. 'Sir, that is all visionary. I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual. Sir, the danger of the abuse of power is nothing to a private man. What Frenchman is prevented from passing his life as he pleases?' SIR ADAM. 'But, Sir, in the British constitution it is surely of importance to keep up a spirit in the people, so as to preserve a balance against the crown.' JOHNSON. 'Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig. Why all this childish jealousy of the power of the crown? The crown has not power enough. When I say that all governments are alike, I consider that in no government power can be abused long. Mankind will not bear it. If a sovereign oppresses his people to a great degree, they will rise and cut off his head. There is a remedy in human nature against tyranny, that will keep us safe under every form of government.'"

Does this opinion justify Macaulay's statement?

13, 21. **Capulets—Montagues:** the rival houses in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.*

13, 22. **Blues—Greens:** spectators at Roman chariot-races divided into parties named from the colors of the rival charioteers. These parties sometimes carried to outrageous extremes their hostility to the opposing factions. (See Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* Chap. 40, Section 2.)

13, 27. **Sacheverell:** a famous Tory preacher. At the time referred to, the Whigs had, very unwisely, just driven Sacheverell from his London pulpit. Popular feeling, especially in the country, warmly supported Sacheverell, whose appearance at Lichfield was probably—as it certainly was elsewhere—the occasion for a kind of excitement which might easily have had some effect upon even a child of three.

14, 2. **Tom Tempest:** a character in the *Idler,* No. 10. He is a rabid Jacobite.

14, 3. **Laud, a poor creature,** etc.: a peevish and ridiculously exaggerated estimate. Archbishop Laud's greatest faults were that he had an inordinate sense of the necessity of outward uniformity in the conduct of church matters, and that he relied upon force rather than persuasion to attain his ends. But Macaulay's words give no idea of Laud's energy, fearlessness, and executive capacity.

14, 3-9. **Laud, Hampden.** Observe that Macaulay is supposed to be proving that Johnson held these opinions when he first came to London, in 1737. Yet some of the evidence cited is of a much later date: the reference to Laud is from *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749); the reference to Hampden is from the *Life of Waller* (1778).

14, 7. **Hampden.** The statesman John Hampden (1594-1643) is best known for his resistance against the tax for ship money. Macaulay's essay on Hampden is one of his most spirited and whole-hearted pieces.

14, 10. **Falkland—Clarendon.** These men are cited by Macaulay in order to show that the tax for ship-money was disapproved even by Royalists. Look up Falkland and Clarendon (Lucius Cary and Edward Hyde) and see if they were Royalists *at the time of the ship-money question.* What bearing has this on Macaulay's use of their names in this passage?

14, 10-11. **Roundhead:** "a Puritan, so named from the practice once prevalent among them of cropping their hair round." (Johnson's *Dictionary.*)

14, 19-20. **Pilloried.** If you look up William Prynne or Daniel Defoe in a biographical dictionary, you will see how they were punished for some of their writings.

14, 22-23. **Dissenters, stock-jobbers,** etc.: men and measures associated—by their enemies, at least—with the Whig party. Look up "dissenter" in the dictionary.

14, 24. **Aversion to the Scotch.** In Hill's edition of Boswell the many references to Scotland and the Scotch are collected in the admirable index. Johnson admitted that "much may be made of a Scotchman, if he be caught young." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* II, 194.) One of the most famous definitions in Johnson's *Dictionary* is "Oats.—A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the

people." Of course many of Johnson's flings at Scotland were merely intended to stir up Boswell. Here, as always, we must distinguish between Johnson's whims and his deliberate judgments. Johnson spoke the truth when he said of himself (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* IV, 239): "I sometimes say more than I mean, in jest; and people are apt to believe me serious."

14, 29-30. **Judgment so disordered.** But Johnson, when he was pronouncing serious judgments, showed a deep love of justice, which party prejudice rarely overcame.

14, 32. **Johnson . . . owned.** The passage (Murphy's *Life of Johnson,* p. 45) is worth quoting. "That Johnson was the author of the debates during that period was not generally known; but the secret transpired several years afterwards, and was avowed by himself on the following occasion. Mr. Wedderburne (now Lord Loughborough), Dr. Johnson, Dr. Francis (the translator of Horace), the present writer, and others, dined with the late Mr. Foote. An important debate towards the end of Sir Robert Walpole's administration being mentioned, Dr. Francis observed, 'That Mr. Pitt's speech, on that occasion, was the best he had ever read.' He added, 'That he had employed eight years of his life in the study of Demosthenes, and finished a translation of the celebrated orator, with all the decorations of style and language within the reach of his capacity; but he had met with nothing equal to the speech above mentioned.' Many of the company remembered the debate; and some passages were cited, with the approbation and applause of all present. During the ardor of conversation Johnson remained silent. As soon as the warmth of praise subsided, he opened with these words: 'That speech I wrote in a garret in Exeter-street.' The company was struck with astonishment. Dr. Francis asked, 'How that speech could be written by him?' 'Sir,' said Johnson, 'I wrote it in Exeter-street. I never had been in the gallery of the House of Commons but once. Cave had interest with the door-keepers. He, and the persons employed under him, gained admittance; they brought away the subject of discussion, the names of the speakers, the side they took, and the order in which they rose, together with notes of the arguments advanced in the course of the debate. The whole was afterwards communicated to me, and I composed the speeches in the form which they now have in the Parlia-

mentary debates.' To this discovery Dr. Francis made answer: 'Then, Sir, you have exceeded Demosthenes himself; for to say, that you have exceeded Francis's Demosthenes, would be saying nothing.' The rest of the company bestowed lavish encomiums on Johnson: one, in particular, praised his impartiality; observing, that he dealt out reason and eloquence with an equal hand to both parties. 'That is not quite true,' said Johnson; 'I saved appearances tolerably well; but I took care that the WHIG DOGS should not have the best of it." (Hill's *Johnsonian Miscellanies,* I, 378-9.)

15, 15-19. **Juvenal—Horace.** The contrast which Macaulay wishes to draw between the two great Roman satirists is, briefly, to represent Horace as hitting off the foibles of men in urbane, highly polished verse, while Juvenal reproves them sternly and indignantly. Horace was an observer of mankind; Juvenal was a reformer.

16, 9. **Boyse:** Samuel Boyse (1708-1749), after an unsuccessful career as a verse-writer for magazines, died in poverty. Johnson said of him that "he had no power of maintaining the dignity of wit, and though his understanding was very extensive, yet but a few could discover that he had any genius above the common rank."

16, 18. **Psalmanazar.** George Psalmanazar (even his name is a fabrication) was a Frenchman who pretended to be a native of Formosa, invented a Formosan language, duped the Royal Society, was desired by dignitaries of the church to "teach the Formosan language to a set of gentlemen, who were afterwards to go with him to convert these people to Christianity," published (1704) *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa,* and finally repented and confessed his deception. He must have been a very remarkable man, for Johnson once said that he would as soon have thought of contradicting a bishop as of contradicting Psalmanazar.

16, 23. **Richard Savage.** Richard Savage (1698?-1743), if remembered at all nowadays, is kept alive not by his poetry but by his friendship with Johnson and by Johnson's biography of him.

16, 25-26. **Blue ribands—Saint James's Square:** people of rank and wealth. The blue ribbon was a badge of the Order of the Garter; St. James's Square was one of the most fashionable parts of London.

16, 27. **Newgate:** the famous London prison. In the eighteenth century the treatment of crime was barbarous in the extreme. Minor offenses (such as petty larceny) were punished by death, executions were public shows, and prisons were dirty and unnecessarily degrading.

17, 4. **Piazza of Covent Garden:** Covent [i.e., Convent] Garden is the square in which the Market now stands. In Johnson's time the Piazza was the arcade on the north and east sides. A picture of Covent Garden in the eighteenth century, showing the "piazza," is to be found in Sir Walter Besant's *London in the Eighteenth Century,* page 115.

17, 11. **Opposition:** the political party not in power; that is, not holding a majority in the Ministry and in Parliament.

17, 24. **Grub Street.** Johnson's own definition (in his *Dictionary*) is: "Originally the name of a street in Moorfields in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called *grubstreet.*"

18, 3. **Warburton:** William Warburton (1698-1779), Bishop of Gloucester, mainly known as a theological scholar, was also, like Johnson, an editor of Shakespeare. Johnson and Warburton had the highest respect for the scholarship and critical ability of each other.

18, 7. **Dictionary.** To compile a dictionary unaided is a stupendous task. The dictionaries of our own day (see the preface to Webster's) are made by a fairly large group of men, each of whom is responsible for only a limited field. But Johnson, with merely clerical assistance and such help as he could get from the rather inadequate dictionaries that had already been made, worked out etymologies, framed definitions, and collected and selected illustrative passages.

18, 13. **Chesterfield:** the Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773) is chiefly known for his *Letters to his Son.* They are interesting as one of the most detailed conduct-books of the eighteenth century. Much of the advice is still valuable, in spite of well-founded objections to Chesterfield's occasional tendency to confuse conduct with manners.

18, 22 ff. **By no means desirous.** The remainder of the sentence is exaggerated, even for Macaulay.

19, 1. **Huge Volumes.** The *Dictionary* is in two very large and very thick folios.

19, 9-10. **Couplets in which the fall of Wolsey is described.** The passage (lines 99-120 of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*) is as follows:

> "In full-blown dignity see WOLSEY stand,
> Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand;
> To him the church, the realm, their pow'rs consign,
> Through him the rays of regal bounty shine,
> Turn'd by his nod the stream of honor flows,
> His smile alone security bestows:
> Still to new heights his restless wishes tow'r,
> Claim leads to claim, and pow'r advances pow'r;
> Till conquest unresisted ceas'd to please,
> And rights submitted left him none to seize.
> At length his sov'reign frowns—the train of state
> Mark the keen glance, and watch the sign to hate.
> Wher'er he turns, he meets a stranger's eye,
> His suppliants scorn him, and his followers fly;
> Now drops at once the pride of awful state,
> The golden canopy, the glitt'ring plate,
> The regal palace, the luxurious board,
> The liv'ried army, and the menial lord.
> With age, with cares, with maladies oppress'd,
> He seeks the refuge of monastic rest.
> Grief aids disease, remember'd folly stings,
> And his last sighs reproach the faith of Kings."

19, 11. **The wonderful lines:** in the original, lines 56 ff. Dryden's translation (lines 87 ff.) runs:

> "Down go the titles; and the statue crown'd
> Is by base hands in the next river drown'd.
> The guiltless horses, and the chariot wheel,
> The same effects of vulgar fury feel:
> The smith prepares his hammer for the stroke,
> While the lung'd bellows hissing fire provoke;
> Sejanus, almost first of Roman names,
> The great Sejanus crackles in the flames:
> . . . . . .
> Adorn your doors with laurels; and a bull,
> Milk-white, and large, lead to the Capitol;

Sejanus with a rope is dragg'd along,
The sport and laughter of the giddy throng!

. . . . . .

When the King's trump, the mob are for the King:
They follow Fortune, and the common cry
Is still against the rogue condemn'd to die."

19, 18. **In the concluding passage.** But the independent student will wish to judge for himself. Of course Macaulay is throughout this paragraph speaking of the power of Juvenal in the original Latin. In translations the effect is somewhat weakened. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* will be found in Osgood's *Selections from Johnson.*

19, 31. **Goodman's Fields.** Garrick made this theater so successful that Gray, who was himself unconvinced of Garrick's genius, writes to a correspondent: "Did I tell you about Mr. Garrick, that the town is horn-mad after him? There are a dozen dukes of a night at Goodman's Fields sometimes."

20, 7. **Johnson saw with . . . envy,** etc. *The Rambler,* No. 200, contains a character of Prospero (i.e., the successful man), which is supposed to be intended for Garrick. Prospero is represented as "a man lately raised to wealth by a lucky project, and too much intoxicated by sudden elevation, or too little polished by thought and conversation, to enjoy his present fortune with elegance and decency." At Prospero's success Johnson declares that he felt "an honest and disinterested joy." Formerly Johnson and Prospero, who had "set out in the world together," had "for a long time mutually assisted each other in [their] exigencies, as either happened to have money or influence beyond his immediate necessities." But now Prospero has a fine house and makes his old friend feel the "insolence of condescension." Prospero's best breakfast room is not for him, nor his best furniture, nor his best china. The visitor was even given the second-best tea, which must particularly have angered him. "Breakfast was at last set; and as I was not willing to indulge the peevishness that began to seize me, I commended the tea. Prospero then told me, that another time I should taste his finest sort, but that he had only a very small quantity remaining, and reserved it for those whom he thought himself obliged to treat with particular respect."

"At length," says the writer, "I left him without any intention of seeing him again, unless some misfortune should restore his understanding."

If Garrick knew that he was intended in this severe satire upon selfishness and ingratitude, it would seem that, if he really were at all like Prospero, he would have completely withdrawn his acquaintance from Johnson. Furthermore the paper seems strangely at variance with that delightful page in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Hill's edition, III, 263-4), where Johnson not only admits that Garrick is a liberal man and that he has "advanced the dignity of his profession," but whimsically asserts: "If all this [i.e., Garrick's fame and wealth] had happened to me, I should have had a couple of fellows with long poles walking before me, to knock down everybody that stood in the way."

20, 17. **Sympathized with each other on so many points.** Boswell (*Life of Johnson,* III, 70), in chronicling the memorable occasion when Johnson met Wilkes, remarks that Johnson would let nobody attack Garrick but himself. See Johnson's famous tribute to Garrick quoted in the note on Walmesley (p. 42, lines 22-23).

20, 23. **Irene.** The plot of *Irene* (acted in 1749), though eventful, is very simple. Mahomet the Great, Emperor of the Turks, falls in love with Irene, a beautiful Greek captive, and asks her to share his kingdom. For a time she refuses, but presently consents. Meanwhile, however, a conspiracy against the life of the emperor has been unearthed and one of the conspirators has, under torture, falsely accused Irene of being implicated in the plot. Irene is put to death before the emperor discovers that she is innocent.

Of the few who nowadays read *Irene* most would probably agree with Garrick's adaptation of Johnson's own line: "When Johnson writes tragedy," said Garrick, "declamation roars, and passion sleeps."

20, 23. **Alterations.** On Johnson's resentment of these alterations, and on the limited success of *Irene,* see Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 196-7.

20, 29. **Closet.** Nowadays a closet is usually unlighted and is the last place in which one would choose to read. What meaning, then, do you attach to the word here?

20, 31. **Blank verse.** Is there in this fact anything char-

acteristic of Johnson's general feeling in regard to poetry? In what meter did most of Johnson's favorite poets write?

20, 31. **A change in the last syllable.** Try this for yourself by looking up both poems and trying to turn a few lines of either one into the meter of the other.

21, 10-11. **The Lay Monastery,** etc. Of these periodicals the *Lay Monastery* is most closely patterned after the *Spectator;* the *Free Thinker* is perhaps the best. For a list of similar periodicals, with notes and criticisms on them, consult Nathan Drake's *Essays . . . illustrative of the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler,* Vol. II, or the catalogue of the Hope Collection in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

21, 22. **Richardson.** Samuel Richardson's long and minute novels (*Clarissa Harlowe* is the longest and most famous) were much read and wept over in Johnson's day. Johnson has very accurately estimated both Richardson's strength and his weakness. Look up the various passages in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and put them together.

21, 24. **Young:** Edward Young (1683-1765). His poetry was somewhat in the manner of Pope, though more solemn and less elaborately finished. His *Night Thoughts* (1742-45) is his most famous work. For this somber poem Johnson had a great admiration. "Johnson was pleased when told of the minute attention with which Young had signified his approbation of his *Essays.*" (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 215.)

21, 24. **Hartley:** David Hartley (1705-1757), the philosopher.

21, 25. **Bubb Dodington.** George Bubb Dodington, Baron Melcombe (1691-1762), though corrupt enough both as regards his private life and his political connections, was a notable patron of literature. Young, Thomson, Fielding, and others, addressed dedications to him,—a proceeding which at the time usually implied money or an appointment in return.

21, 30-33. **Prince Frederic, Leicester House.** The Prince of Wales died in 1751. George II, who lived until 1760, was therefore succeeded by his grandson. Leicester House, in Leicester Square, was then the London residence of the Prince of Wales.

22, 27-32. **Sir Roger,** etc. Sir Roger appears in some fifty *Spectator* papers (see any of the school editions); Sir Roger's chaplain is mentioned in Nos. 106, 112, and elsewhere; the butler in Nos. 106 and 517; Will Wimble in No. 108; Will

Honeycomb in Nos. 2, 41, 77, 251, 409, 511, 530, and elsewhere; the Vision of Mirza is No. 159, the Citizen's Journal, No. 183; the Everlasting Club, No. 72; the Dunmow Flitch, Nos. 607 and 608; Hilpah and Shalum, Nos. 584 and 585; the Visit to the Exchange, No. 69; Sir Roger's Visit to Westminster Abbey, No. 329. It will be observed that Macaulay names only papers by Addison. Look up Macaulay's essay on Addison and see what he thought of Addison's contributions as compared with those of Steele. Then read some of Steele's papers and ask yourself if Macaulay is wholly justified in his opinion.

22, 34 ff. **Squire Bluster,** etc. These characters appear, respectively in Numbers 142, 138, 82, 126, 22, 161, and 186 of the *Rambler.*

23, 14. **The Gunnings.** The Gunning sisters were so beautiful that their appearance upon the street or in a drawing-room caused an actual commotion.

23, 15. **Lady Mary:** Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), a woman of great intelligence and spirit, as well as of extraordinary wit. Her *Letters* are still delightful.

23, 17. **Monthly Review:** established in 1749 by Ralph Griffiths. Goldsmith wrote for it at one time. In 1767 Johnson told the king that the *Monthly Review* was more careful than the *Critical Review,* although less firm in its support of the church. (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* II, 40.) Again (III, 32) he told Boswell that the critics of the *Monthly Review* read their books through because they were not fertile enough to "lay hold of the topic, and write chiefly from their own minds" as did the writers for the *Critical Review.*

23, 23-24. **Set himself . . . doggedly to work.** Johnson declared, though not on this occasion, that "a man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* V, 40.)

24, 2. **Two successive numbers of the World:** numbers 100 and 101, Nov. 28 and Dec. 5, 1754. The passage particularly alluded to (No. 100) points out the lack of a standard for the English language, which is indeed, says the writer, in a state of anarchy. He then goes on: "The time for discrimination seems to be now come. Toleration, adoption, and naturalization have run their lengths. Good order and authority are now necessary. But where shall we find them, and at the same time, the obedience due to them? We must have recourse to the

old Roman expedient in times of confusion, and choose a dictator. Upon this principle I give my vote for Mr. Johnson to fill that great and arduous post. And I hereby declare that I make a total surrender of all my rights and privileges in the English language, as a free-born British subject, to the said Mr. Johnson, during the term of his dictatorship. Nay more; I will not only obey him, like an old Roman, as my dictator, but, like a modern Roman, I will implicitly believe in him as my pope, and hold him to be infallible while in the chair; but not longer. More than this he cannot well require; for I presume that obedience can never be expected when there is neither terror to enforce, nor interest to invite it." One should read these two papers through in order to understand the feeling which they must have aroused in Johnson. In the second of these two papers Chesterfield expresses "a greater opinion of his [Johnson's] impartiality and severity as a judge, than of his gallantry as a fine gentleman."

24, 20. **Horne Tooke.** John Horne Tooke (1736-1812) was a politician and philologist. His *Diversions of Purley* (1786 ff.) revealed him as far surpassing Johnson in his knowledge of those Teutonic languages that bear upon English etymology. Tooke, however, had great respect for Johnson's genius and was much gratified to hear that Johnson had said (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* III, 354) that if he were to make a new edition of the *Dictionary* he should adopt several of Tooke's etymologies.

25, 4. **Junius and Skinner.** Johnson fully acknowledged his dependence upon the earlier etymological dictionaries of Francis Junius and Stephen Skinner. Johnson thought that "Junius appears to have excelled in extent of learning, and Skinner in rectitude of understanding."

25, 11-12. **Spunging-houses.** Johnson himself defines "spunging-house" in his *Dictionary* as "a house to which debtors are taken before commitment to prison, where the bailiffs sponge upon them, or riot at their cost."

25, 24. **The very best thing that he ever wrote.** Soame Jenyns (1704-1787) was very fairly characterized by Boswell (*Life of Johnson,* I, 315): "Jenyns was possessed of lively talents, and a style eminently pure and easy, and could very happily play with a light subject, either in prose or verse; but when he ventured on that most difficult and excruciating ques-

tion, the Origin of Evil, he 'ventured far beyond his depth,' and, accordingly, was exposed by Johnson, both with acute argument and brilliant wit."

26, 10. **Rasselas.** Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) must be read as a series of essays rather than as a romance. That the scene and characters are remote from England means little: Johnson, like many eighteenth-century writers, was fond of giving advice to his countrymen by dressing his ideas in foreign costume. Look at Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* or Addison's *Spectator,* No. 50, and notice how those authors contrive to hint that Englishmen still had much to learn. (See the extract from *Rasselas* on pages 63 ff. of this volume.)

26, 12. **Miss Lydia Languish.** Lydia Languish, although she is less famous than Mrs. Malaprop, is worth knowing. Like Mrs. Malaprop, she appears in Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* (1775). Her weakness is her delight in romantic novels.

27, 11. **Bruce's Travels.** Johnson can hardly be blamed for not having read Bruce's *Travels,* for they did not appear until after his death. Macaulay's criticism upon *Rasselas* in this paragraph betrays ignorance of the attitude of most eighteenth-century English writers toward the East, which they used chiefly as a point of view.

27, 16. **Mrs. Lennox.** Charlotte Lennox (1720-1804) was born in New York but lived in England nearly all of her life. Her *Female Quixote,* a satirical novel, was popular, and her *Shakespeare Illustrated* was preceded by a dedication from the hand of Johnson, who once gave a dinner in her honor, at which he crowned her with laurel. It is reported that on this occasion "Johnson's face shone with meridian splendor, though his drink had been only lemonade." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 255 n.)

27, 16. **Mrs. Sheridan:** mother of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. She wrote novels and plays. Johnson said to her, concerning the distressful happenings of her most famous novel, "I know not, Madam, that you have a right, upon moral principles, to make your readers suffer so much." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 390.)

27, 29. **Had little right to blame.** The implication is misleading: Johnson does, to be sure, note the anachronisms mentioned by Macaulay, but characterizes such objections as Macaulay here ascribes to him as "the petty cavils of petty

minds." As to the anachronisms themselves, the first occurs in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida,* II, ii; the second in *A Winter's Tale,* V, ii. Both Aristotle and Julio Romano lived much too late for Shakespeare's purpose.

28, 5-6. **Reflections on Whig party.** The definitions in question are as follows: "*Whig:* The name of a faction"; "*Excise:* A hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but by wretches hired by those to whom excise is paid"; "*Pension:* An allowance made to any one without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country"; "*Pensioner:* One who is supported by an allowance paid at the will of another; a dependent." The incident concerning the word *Renegade* (or *Renegado*) is thus reported by Johnson: "When I came to the word *Renegado,* after telling that it meant 'one who deserts to the enemy, a revolter,' I added, *Sometimes we say a* GOWER. Thus it went to the press; but the printer had more wit than I, and struck it out." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 296.)

Is "coarse" the appropriate word to describe Johnson's definition of *excise?*

28, 11. **Lord Privy Seal.** He had charge of the "privy seal," which is the lesser seal for state papers. The "great seal" was in charge of the Lord Keeper.

28, 17-18. **Had ascended the throne.** In what year?

28, 20-22. **The city,** etc.: that is, London feeling was mainly Whig; Oxford, Tory. The Cavendishes and Bentincks were prominent Whig families; the Somersets and Wyndhams were Tories.

28, 23. **To kiss hands:** not each other's hands, but the hand of the king, as a token of submission to his service.

28, 24. **Lord Bute.** John Stuart (1713-1792), third Earl of Bute, became George III's prime minister in 1762.

28, 28. **Pension.** To an American the word "pension" suggests a reward for military service. In England, however, pensions are granted for civil service in public office, and even for the service which a man renders to the nation by achieving distinction in any worthy career. In his *Dictionary* Johnson had given definitions (see the note on 28, 5-6) which made him doubt whether he ought to receive the bounty of his sovereign. But Johnson's scruples were overcome by the advice of his friends,

and by the tact of Lord Bute, who assured Johnson that the pension was offered not for anything he might do in the future but for that which he had done in the past.

29, 29-30. **Ghost . . . Cock Lane.** Here again Macaulay misrepresents Johnson, whose attitude in the matter of the famous Cock Lane Ghost was by no means weakly credulous. The incident is discussed at length by Boswell (*Life of Johnson,* I, 406-7), who assures us that "Johnson was one of those by whom the imposture was detected."

30, 3. **Churchill:** Charles Churchill (1731-1764), author of many violent satires in verse, produced in 1762-1763 *The Ghost,* a satire in four books. In the second book he draws Johnson as

> "Pomposo, insolent and loud,
> Vain idol of a *scribbling* crowd,
> Whose very name inspires an awe,
> Whose ev'ry word is Sense and Law,
> For what his Greatness hath decreed,
> Like Laws of Persia and of Mede,
> Sacred thro' all the realm of *Wit,*
> Must never of Repeal admit;
> . . . . . .
> Who, to increase his native strength,
> Draws words six syllables in length,
> With which, assisted with a frown
> By way of Club, he knocks us down."

In the third book Churchill again introduces Johnson and sneers at his delay in producing his *Shakespeare:*

> "He for *Subscribers* baits his hook,
> And takes their cash—but where's the Book?"

30, 19-20. The note on the character of Polonius is as follows: "*Polonius* is a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident of his knowledge, proud of his eloquence, and declining to dotage. His mode of oratory is truly represented as designed to ridicule the practice of those times, of prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained. This part of his character is accidental, the rest is natural. Such a man is positive

and confident, because he knows that his mind was once strong, and knows not that it has become weak. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory, and can draw from his repositories of knowledge, he utters weighty sentences, and gives useful counsel; but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent, the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties, he loses the order of his ideas, and entangles himself in his own thoughts, till he recovers the leading principle, and falls again into his former train. The idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom, will solve all the phenomena of the character of *Polonius.*"

30, 21-22. **Wilhelm Meister's admirable examination of Hamlet.** Try to look this up either in a copy of Carlyle's translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister,* or in Rolfe's edition of *Hamlet.* Macaulay, lamenting his own lack of critical insight, said that this passage from Goethe raised in him admiration and despair.

30, 22 ff. **It would be difficult,** etc. Much more favorable, and much more authoritative, is the opinion of Sir Sidney Lee (*Life of William Shakespeare,* ed. 1909, page 334) that although Johnson's text and notes leave much to be desired, yet, "in his preface and elsewhere he displays a genuine, if occasionally sluggish sense of Shakespeare's greatness, and his massive sagacity enabled him to indicate convincingly Shakespeare's triumphs of characterization."

31, 6. **Ben:** Ben Jonson. Find out enough about him to keep him distinct from Samuel Johnson.

31, 13 ff. **Æschylus,** etc. Why is this case a parallel to that of the English dramatists (mentioned just below) in reference to Shakespeare?

31, 17 ff. **Massinger,** etc. These dramatists (Shakespeare's immediate predecessors, his contemporaries, and his immediate successors) wrote what Macaulay calls "that very part of our literature with which it is especially desirable that an editor of Shakespeare should be conversant." What help might Johnson have derived from their plays?

31, 27. **Royal Academy.** The Royal Academy of Arts was formed in 1768. Johnson, Boswell, and Goldsmith held appointments in connection with it. Boswell (see the index in

Hill's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* under "Royal Academy") has many anecdotes of Johnson's speech and conduct at its dinners.

33, 5-6. **The service of the trunk-maker and the pastry-cook:** that is, to be used for linings and for wrapping-paper.

33, 9 ff. **Goldsmith, Reynolds, Burke.** These men are far too important to be dismissed in a brief note. Let one or more pupils take each name, collect and arrange the passages in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* which illustrate his character and his relations with Johnson, and then report to the class.

33, 12. **Jones:** Sir William Jones (1746-1794) was one of the very few scholars of his time who chose to exercise his powers in the field of Oriental language.

33, 29-30. **To this day.** Macaulay was made a member in 1839.

34, 1. **Boswell.** See Introduction, pages xxxi-xxxiii.

34, 15. **Wilkes.** Some of the political utterances of John Wilkes (1728-1797), editor of the *North Briton,* were so bold that he was not merely expelled from Parliament but was actually imprisoned. The Bill of Rights Society was an association of the followers of Wilkes.

34, 17. **Whitefield:** George Whitefield (pronounced as if spelled Whitfield) was the great open-air preacher of the Methodists. Read what Benjamin Franklin says in his *Autobiography* about Whitefield's preaching.

34, 26. **Such questions as.** For the particular question and the amusing dialogue which ensued, see Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* II, 100-101.

34, 28. **Johnson . . . a water-drinker.** This is hardly true. Johnson himself said in 1778: "Early in life I drank wine; for many years I drank none. I then for some years drank a great deal. I then had a severe illness, and left it off, and I have never begun it again." In 1776 he said that he believed he had "drunk too little, and therefore have the gout;" in 1782 he told Hannah More that his reason for not taking wine was that he could not otherwise avoid excess. See Hill's very full note in his edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* I, 103 ff.

36, 8-9. **Southwark:** a district of London which lies south of the Thames. Streatham Common is a few miles further south.

36, 27. **Buck, Maccaroni:** cant terms (like "dude") for men of fashion.

37, 26-27. **Mitre Tavern.** "The Mitre Tavern still stands in Fleet Street: but where now is its Scot-and-lot paying, beef-and-ale loving, cock-hatted, potbellied Landlord; its rosy-faced, assiduous Landlady, with all her shining brass-pans, waxed tables, well-filled larder-shelves; her cooks, and bootjacks, and errand-boys, and watery-mouthed hangers-on? Gone! Gone! The becking waiter, that with wreathed smiles was wont to spread for Samuel and Bozzy their 'supper of the gods,' has long since pocketed his last sixpence; and vanished, sixpences and all, like a ghost at cockcrowing."—Carlyle's *Review of Boswell's Johnson.*

37, 30-31. **Bookseller . . . patron.** Their names appear, by an arrangement of the sentence rather characteristic of Macaulay, a few lines further on.

38, 4-5. **An important event.** Boswell should by all means be read for a detailed account of the matters which Macaulay sums up so rapidly in this paragraph.

38, 5. **Hebrides:** a group of islands off the west coast of Scotland. They are sometimes called the Western Islands. Johnson's book about his travels there was entitled *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775).

39, 22. **Macpherson.** The case of James Macpherson (1736-1796) is less simple, apparently, than Johnson and Macaulay supposed. His "Epics" (*Fingal,* 1762, and *Temora,* 1763), although they show no great knowledge or sense of editorial responsibility, do probably contain some genuinely popular versions of Gaelic material which, though quite clearly more modern than the date (A.D. 250) assigned by Macpherson, is still very old.

39, 25-26. **Johnson reiterated the charge of forgery:** in the following letter:

MR. JAMES MACPHERSON:

I received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian.

What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your Homer, are not so formidable, and

what I hear of your morals, inclines me to pay regard not to what you say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

SAM. JOHNSON.

40, 12. **Kenricks, Campbells, MacNicols, and Hendersons.** Kenrick attacked Johnson's *Shakespeare,* Campbell attacked his style, MacNicol and Henderson attacked his *Journey to the Western Islands.* All are forgotten.

40, 19. **Maxime,** etc. I am most eager for a contest with you, if you are willing.

40, 31. **That fine apothegm of Bentley:** "It is a maxim with me that no man was ever written out of reputation but by himself." (Bishop Monk's *Life of Bentley,* p. 90.) Trevelyan (*Life of Macaulay,* II, 211) tells us that Macaulay dearly loved to quote this maxim both in print and in conversation. He quotes it, as "justly and nobly" said, in the sixth paragraph of his life of Francis Atterbury, which appeared in the eighth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* along with the present essay.

41, 15. **Almon and Stockdale:** booksellers and publishers. The former, particularly, dealt largely in political books and pamphlets.

41, 15-16. **Taxation no Tyranny:** *Taxation no Tyranny; an Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress* (1775). Boswell had an unfavorable opinion of this pamphlet, in which, he says (*Life of Johnson,* II, 313), were united "positive assertion, sarcastical severity, and extravagant ridicule."

42, 10. **Wilson:** Richard Wilson (1714-1782). "Wilson is now acknowledged to be one of the greatest of English landscape-painters. His art . . . was somewhat formal and careless in detail, but in grandeur of design, in breadth of treatment, in the harmony of its rich but quiet color, and in the rendering of space and air, Wilson has few rivals." (*Dictionary of National Biography.*)

42, 18. **Cowley:** Abraham Cowley, a contemporary of Milton. His poetry, much admired by contemporaries, was still esteemed when Johnson wrote his *Lives of the Poets,* in which the life of Cowley is one of the best.

42, 23. **Restoration.** Of whom? When? For what reasons? What change did the Restoration make in Parliament? In the Church?

42, 28. **Walmesley.** Johnson's grateful tribute to him, which also contains a famous saying about David Garrick, deserves to be remembered. It appears in Johnson's sketch of Edmund Smith, in his *Lives of the English Poets:*

"Of Gilbert Walmesley, thus presented to my mind, let me indulge myself in the remembrance. I knew him very early; he was one of the first friends that literature procured me, and I hope that, at least, my gratitude made me worthy of his notice.

"He was of an advanced age, and I was only not a boy, yet he never received my notions with contempt. He was a Whig, with all the virulence and malevolence of his party; yet differences of opinion did not keep us apart. I honored him and he endured me.

"He had mingled with the gay world without exemption from its vices or its follies; but he never neglected the cultivation of his mind. His belief of revelation was unshaken; his learning preserved his principles; he grew first regular, and then pious.

"His studies had been so various, that I am not able to name a man of equal knowledge. His acquaintance with books was great, and what he did not immediately know, he could, at least, tell where to find. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day now passes, in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.

"At this man's table I enjoyed many cheerful and instructive hours, with companions such as are not often found—with one who has lengthened, and one who has gladdened life; with Dr. James, whose skill in physic will be long remembered; and with David Garrick, whom I hoped to have gratified with this character of our common friend. But what are the hopes of man! I am disappointed by that stroke of death, which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure." Compare 5: 32.

42, 29. **Cibber:** Colley Cibber (1671-1757). He made over plays by Shakespeare, Dryden, and other dramatists, both French and English.

42, 30. **Orrery.** John Boyle (1707-1762), fifth Earl of Orrery, published in 1751 his *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Jonathan Swift.* Johnson thought that Orrery "tried to pass for a

better talker, a better writer, and a better thinker than he was." (Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* V, 238.)

42, 32. **Services:** information derogatory to various persons menioned in Pope's *Dunciad.*

43, 12. **When grossly and provokingly unjust:** as in the life of Gray, and in parts of the Milton.

44, 6. **Malone.** He edited Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* Some of his notes therein are valuable.

44, 20. **Robertson:** William Robertson (1721-1793), a Scottish historian. Of his works the *History of the Emperor Charles V* (1769) is usually considered the best.

44, 34. **Regretted.** What meaning has this word in this passage?

45, 18. **Soon.** It was three years after her husband's death that Mrs. Thrale married Piozzi.

45, 18. **A music-master from Brescia.** The remainder of this paragraph is so distorted by prejudice as to be almost without value.

45, 33-34. **In a solemn and tender prayer.** See page 71 of this volume.

46, 16. **The Ephesian matron.** In the midst of her violent grief for her husband, the Ephesian matron fell in love with a soldier and married him the same day. The story is briefly summarized in the second chapter of John Dunlop's *History of Fiction.*

46, 16-17. **The two pictures.** See *Hamlet,* III, iv.

48, 20. **Anfractuosities.** Johnson does not include this word in his *Dictionary.* He does, however, define "anfractuousness" as "fulness of windings and turnings."

51, 3-4. **The proprietor of the World:** Edward Moore (1712-1757), of whom there is a brief but good sketch in the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

51, 4. **Two papers:** numbers 100 and 101. See the note on page 24, line 2.

51, 12-13. **Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre:** adapted from Boileau's line, "Je chante le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre." (*L'Art Poétique,* iii, 272.) Johnson's version ("the conqueror of the conqueror of the land") is, of course, not a misquotation, but a necessary change.

52, 3. **The shepherd in Virgil:** *Eclogues,* viii, 43 ff.

54, 17. **Parva,** etc. "Small matters did they not occur daily." (Pliny, *Letters,* iii, 3.)

61 (Motto). **Respicere,** etc.: Juvenal, *Satires,* x, 275. The context is

> Festino ad nostros, et regem transeo Ponti,
> Et Crœsum, quem vox justi facunda Solonis
> Respicere ad longæ jussit spatia ultima vitæ:

"I hasten to ours, and pass by the King of Pontus, and Crœsus, whom the persuasive voice of the just Solon directed to contemplate the last chapters of a long life."

66, 20 ff. (Summary.) It will be understood that this summary is supplied by the editor to bridge the gap between the first chapter of *Rasselas* and the tenth.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

(The numbers refer to paragraphs)

1. What did Samuel Johnson inherit from his father? Do you see any possible connection between Johnson's early reading and his father's occupation? What are the advantages of reading what is interesting and passing over what is dull? What are the disadvantages?

2, 3, 4. Try to find out all that you can about Oxford. In what ways does it seem to you different from an American college?

5. Do you imagine that Johnson's peculiarities of manner were as extraordinary as Macaulay represents them? How should you go about to test this matter for yourself? Try to find out what accounts of Johnson have come down to us from those who knew him.

9, 10. Do you think that London played a larger part in the literary history of Johnson's time than a great city does now? Why? Would the effect of patronage be to make possible the very best sort of literature?

13. What is the difference between a Whig and a Tory? Which was Addison? Swift? Defoe? How do their political feelings appear in their writings? Which writings are likely to last longer,—those in which political feeling is bitter or those in which it can hardly be seen? Give examples.

14, 15. Find as many cases as you can in which authors of Johnson's time made use of the classics. Why is the eighteenth century called the "age of classicism"? Who were the men whose favor a young author anxious to succeed in the London of Johnson's time would most wish to gain?

16. In what respect were Johnson's character and literary attainments superior to those of his companions?

22. Try to write out an imaginary conversation between Johnson and Garrick upon some subject which will bring out the traits of character in each which Macaulay mentions.

23-25. Do you think you could, without being told, distinguish a number of the *Spectator* from a number of the *Rambler*? Try to write a pair of essays,—one in the manner of Addison,

the other in the manner of Johnson. Try to find passages in Johnson's writings which reveal the qualities mentioned by Macaulay (page 18, lines 26-32). Do the *Rambler* papers mentioned by Macaulay represent Johnson at his best?

27. Is it to be regretted that Chesterfield did not become Johnson's patron? What makes Johnson's letter to Chesterfield so fine? Why is it so easy to read aloud? Try changing about some of the phrases: is the effect changed? In what way?

28. What constitutes a good dictionary? Are there any evidences of personality in modern dictionaries? What qualifications had Johnson for making a good dictionary? What disqualifications? Try for practice to make, without consulting a dictionary, good definitions of a few familiar words; for example, "home," "identity," "gate," "lamp," "pencil," "flower," "book," "various." What difficulties did you find in doing this? What, as a result of your efforts, do you think are the essentials of a good definition? Compare your own definitions of the words given above with those in the dictionary. What is there in the preface of a modern dictionary? What is there at the end?

30. Is the *Idler* a good title for Johnson's periodical? What did Johnson think about idleness? Was he inclined to be idle himself? Why?

33. Why is *Rasselas* not read nowadays? What novels written before 1800 are most famous? Do fashions in novels change more or less rapidly than fashions in essays? Why?

34. Do you think that Johnson was right in accepting the pension? What does "three hundred a year" mean? Does it mean three hundred dollars? Learn the names and values of the principal English coins (penny, shilling, crown, etc.). How much is a pound? Are pensions given in England nowadays?

36. Is there anything in this paragraph which bears upon the first two questions on paragraph 30?

37. In what estimation was Shakespeare held in the eighteenth century? What other important eighteenth-century authors edited Shakespeare? Who, in addition to Shakespeare, were the great Elizabethan dramatists? What impression of the Elizabethan period do you get from reading Scott's *Kenilworth*? Mention some of the ways in which you think the Elizabethan age differed from the time of Johnson.

38. Find out more about the principal members of the Club. Select one who interests you, look up all the passages about him in Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* and then try to piece them together into a character sketch.

39. Do you think that much skill is involved in writing a book like Boswell's *Life of Johnson?* Did Boswell, do you suppose, write down *everything* that Johnson said? If not, what did he select? Are Boswell's descriptions of by-play good? Find some passage to illustrate your answer. What did Carlyle think about "hero-worship"? How does this apply to Boswell's feeling for Johnson?

40. What can you say about Johnson's relations with the Thrales? About Johnson's household?

41. What can you say about Johnson's travels? What qualities of mind constitute an intelligent traveler? For what reasons was traveling in the eighteenth century more difficult and dangerous than it is now? Do you know of any other eighteenth-century men of letters who traveled at all extensively? Did their writings show that they had traveled? Why did Johnson dislike the Scotch? Find as many passages as you can in Boswell which show Johnson's opinions about Scotland and the Scotch. Did he mean to have all these remarks taken seriously—except by Boswell?

43-44. In what ways did Johnson show that he was a strong Tory?

45-48. Why does Macaulay call the *Lives of the Poets* Johnson's best work? What do you think a similar series of *Lives of the Poets* by Macaulay would have been like? In what respects might it have been superior to Johnson's? In what respects would it probably have been inferior? Try to find out enough about Gray to see what there was about his poetry that Johnson would not be likely to care for.

50. Do you think Macaulay's account of Mrs. Thrale's second marriage shows prejudice? In what expressions? Do you think that it shows anything in respect to Johnson's influence over his friends?

Make an outline of the entire essay.

Are there any important parts of Johnson's life which Macaulay passes over too briefly? Are there any to which he gives a needless amount of space?

Are Macaulay's transitions easy? Give five or six examples. Can you, by analyzing them, see how he does it? If you can, try to write a composition of two paragraphs, paying special attention to the transition from the first paragraph to the second.

Read through a number of the paragraphs of this essay, drawing a line under the topic-sentence of each paragraph. Is there any particular part of the paragraph where Macaulay tends to place the topic sentence? Is this effective? Why?

Has Macaulay a large vocabulary? Does he use simple words? Make a list of fifty words in this essay which you yourself do not often use. Look up the meaning of those you do not know. Select a few of them each week (say five), and try to introduce them into your writing and your conversation.

Do you think that Johnson, if he could have chosen a biographer, would have selected Macaulay? Give your reasons.

What do you think are the best points about Macaulay's life of Johnson?

"Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man."

Bacon.

"'Tis the good reader that makes the good book."

Emerson.

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